CAPITOL HILL

by HARVEY FERGUSSON

A Novel of Washington Life

HARVEY FERGUSSON

was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1890 and went to school there and in Washington, D. C. He passed an examination to be a forest ranger, but was offered a government job in Washington. This he soon gave up to become a reporter with several papers. For the past few years he has been writing feature stories for a syndicate in Washington, and this work has afforded him opportunity for extensive travel.

The Blood of the Conquerors, Mr. Fergusson's first novel, was written, as he says, "for my own amusement and satisfaction."

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by

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by

Harvey Fergusson

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CHAPTER ONE

I

Ralph Dolan awoke slowly from slumber made deep by exhaustion and champagne. The little table near the foot of the bed, with its white water pitcher on a tray and its Gideon bible, first reminded him that he was in a hotel. He next remembered that it was a hotel in Washington, and that he was not alone. Lazily, luxuriously, he turned toward his companion—then came up short on his elbow, blinking in amazement. A dent in the pillow, a single blond-celluloid hairpin and a faint perfume were all that remained of her. He glanced quickly around the room. The chair which had been heaped with her silken things was empty. He reached his feet with a bound that made the bed springs creak and threw open the bathroom door.

She was gone, beyond a doubt. He was about to reach for his bill-folder in the pocket of his coat when he noticed a scribbled sheet of the hotel letter-paper lying on the bureau.

I think you're a nice sweet boy, it read, *and as I told you last night you have pretty brown eyes. So I left you ten dollars. Usually I don't leave anything. Hope this won't cause you too much trouble.*

Love

EMMA.

He swore fervently and stood for a moment staring at the note, then crumpled it up and threw it across the room.

"That little party cost me just two hundred and ninety-three dollars—if she really left the ten," he remarked to himself. "And I would have bet my last nickel that she was the real stuff."

The blow to his self-esteem hurt him a good deal more than the blow to his pocket-book. The ten dollars was now all that he possessed, nor did he know where the next dollar was to be got, but he was accustomed to making money easily and spending it easily. This was not the first time that he had been stranded in a strange town. But it was the first time in several years that he had made such a grievous error in judgment.

He had arrived in Washington the night before with a little more than three hundred dollars in his pocket as the result of a run of luck in pool and poker. He had taken advantage of this affluence to resign his position as a travelling salesman for a firm that manufactured college fraternity jewellery. His intention had been to spend a few days in the capital, which he had never seen, inspecting its wonders and relaxing from the cares of business, and then to go on to New York where he had friends and the prospect of a job in a brokerage house.

The woman he had encountered in Peacock Alley. She was pretty, and nicely and modishly dressed, and when her dropping of a silver mesh bag had given him the opportunity to speak to her, she had seemed all simplicity and confusion. He had felt sure that she was just what she pretended to be —a young widow who had expected to meet friends there, and had received a telegram saying they were unavoidably delayed. Indeed, she had held the crumpled telegram in her hand. She had apparently felt lonely and confused and had wanted some one to listen to her troubles and to answer her questions about Washington and the trains and things

like that. The skill with which he had faked a mutual acquaintance, the delicacy with which he had led up to the matter of dining together, his success in overcoming her scruples against drinking champagne with a stranger, her final bewildered, half-frightened surrender, had all been sweet to his vanity. He had accounted this one of the most brilliant of his conquests. It was bitter to realize that he, who had always prided himself above all on his cunning and acuteness, had been so easily and completely taken in.

His plans, of course, were wholly upset. It would never do to arrive in New York penniless. His letters to Carswell, a college friend whom he had not seen for years, had intimated that he had been making a little money on the stock market and that he desired to form a closer connection with it. His three hundred dollars he had intended to use in a prodigal fashion for the purpose of making just the right impression on Carswell and his associates. It was perfectly clear that he was in Washington to stay a while, whether he liked the town or not.

A perfectly healthy man without a trace of nervousness, he was chagrined, but not at all shaken or depressed. He shaved in his usual careful and leisurely way and emerged from his bath in a fine glow, snorting with satisfaction, rubbing himself vigorously with a large Turkish towel. He had an excellent body—strong, stocky, hairy, round and full in chest and limb, expressing a great vitality. He was of the physical type that fattens and coarsens toward middle life, but at his present age of twenty-five years, he was wholly pleasing to look upon. Given a little more length of limb and grace of movement, with his bright, shallow brown eyes, full red lips and thick curly hair, he would have done for the part of a young Bacchus.

2

Ralph Dolan was a native of Muncie, Indiana, and could fairly claim that he belonged to one of its oldest families, for his grandfather had come there when the place was a village. This first of the Muncie Dolans had led for years a wandering life as a pedlar of Bibles and a gambler on river steamboats, but having elected at middle age to settle down in Muncie, he had displayed a great aptitude for the gathering of worldy goods. He came to be known as a shrewd and unscrupulous trader in land, horses and all other commodities of a mid-western community of that time. He had nevertheless been on the whole a useful citizen, because he had been compelled by the circumstances of his environment to devote a considerable part of his energy to the business of clearing and planting land.

His son, Ralph's father, exercising much the same aptitudes and ethics in the succeeding generation, when industrial expansion had begun, became a self-styled promoter, dealing in the stocks of all sorts of concerns, but especially in those of the oil and gas companies, which were then in the heyday of their expansion. He had followed the oil boom all over the west, buying and selling, winning and losing. For a time he had been accounted a rich man, but as he grew older and competition became keener, his easily gotten wealth slipped away from him. When he died, during Ralph's first year in college, he left his wife and son almost destitute. This situation had put a welcome end to Ralph's formal education, and with the death of his mother, a year later, had left him free to lead a roving life, which he had found wholly congenial. In three years he had been in most of the principal cities of the United States, had held a great variety of jobs, and had demonstrated a marked aptitude for trade and bluff.

His favourite occupation had always been that of a salesman of stocks, bonds or real estate. He was successful at it, and proud of his ability to make a convincing selling talk. He had heard it said of him that he could sell a correspondence course in dancing to a man with a wooden leg, and this deft compliment had given him great pleasure.

Owing to the facts that he was always moving about, and that he was a persistent gambler at poker, pool and craps, he had frequently been under the necessity of stooping temporarily to occupations less dignified than salesmanship. On a few occasions he had been compelled to do hard manual labour, for which he had the greatest distaste. As a rule, when he found himself in desperate and sudden need in a place where he was not known, he sought a job as waiter, and he had gained some slight skill in this occupation. It gave him plenty to eat, which was important because he had a large appetite, and enabled him to save his wages for another move. The work was easy, and he did not in the least mind its menial quality, so long as he could keep the fact that he had engaged in it a secret from his friends. He took keen pleasure in sizing up his patrons and in practising just the wiles of manner that would bring a large tip in a given instance. Once he had worked up to the place of head waiter at a large family beer garden near St. Louis. The other employés were all girls, some of them pretty, and all eager to gain his favour. Tips were large and abundant. He had soon found himself the master of a fat bank account and an attractive seraglio. Loath to leave such a soft berth, he had raised a moustache and cultivated a German accent by way of disguise. But one day in the height of the season he had found himself advancing to meet a party of five, three of whom were from his own home town.

Thereupon he had turned on his heel and made rapid escape by way of a side door, to the great astonishment of his employer and associates, who never saw him again, and gave it out that his mind had failed by reason of the heat.

After three years of delightful vagabondage he had obtained a position which he had held for two years because it was so exactly suited to his aptitudes and habits. He had remained in college long enough to become a member of the Eta Beta Pi national fraternity, and he became an agent for Thorne and Amherst, fraternity jewellers, selling their wares to the members of his own fraternity, which was represented at some forty colleges and universities in twenty-five different states. He sold not only fraternity pins, but also pipes, cigarette cases, tie pins, cuff links and a great variety of other trinkets emblazoned with the fraternity emblem. These goods were sold at an enormous profit and his commissions were high. His method was to go to a hotel in a college town and send word to the members of his fraternity that he was there. Soon the bored and idle youths were all gathered about him and inspecting his goods. If trade were dull he was always ready to gamble on a sale, and these college boys were also easy marks for him at pool, poker and craps. He nearly always came away from a college town with a large green roll in his pocket, which he would proceed to spend upon the flesh pots of the nearest large city.

Besides his skill in games of chance, he had another aptitude which served him well in this work. He was an indefatigable collector and a skilful teller of Rabelaisian stories. When word of his presence was noised about in a college town, his room was sure to be quickly filled with men who came primarily to hear him talk, but often stayed to buy or

to gamble. He brought them not only the rich and ribald folk lore that is current in smoking cars, but also long tales based on his own adventures, with a liberal admixture of invention. In the fabricating and telling of these tales he was an artist without knowing it. There was something in him of the born story-teller and something of the mime. As the college fellows said, he was a gifted liar, and in the exercise of his gift he steadily improved his ability for the simple and effective use of language. Often he would spend a long afternoon on the train turning a yarn over and over in his mind, feeling out its possibilities of suspense and climax with real delight. It was a favourite ruse of his to get some gullible freshman into his room and interested in a trinket, painfully torn between his desire to possess the thing and the knowledge that he could not afford it. Then Ralph would begin one of his long Arabian-night-like tales. At the ending of a thrilling episode the freshman would perhaps begin to edge toward the door, and always Ralph would call him back.

"Wait a minute. I want to tell you what happened the next night."

Often the hesitating customer, detained again and again by this entertaining recital and with the coveted treasure always tempting him, would end by purchasing it.

As far as his taste and comfort were concerned, Ralph might have continued in this occupation indefinitely. It richly satisfied most of the simple cravings of his nature—his need of change and adventure, his large and healthy appetites, his desire to flatter himself by outwitting the other fellow. And yet the very ease and completeness of these satisfactions bred discontent and ambition. He had become tired of fooling callow college boys out of their money, and of his easy conquests among waitresses and

department store girls. Both his self-confidence and desire had grown on success. He felt that he was fit for larger things. Everywhere he saw men who had won greater stakes in the game of life than he had dared to play for. Where he had made hundreds they had made thousands. They possessed houses and motor cars and knew beautiful women richly dressed. And he strongly suspected that most of them were not as shrewd nor as able as he. A desire to get away from his easy half-vagabond habits, to thrust himself in among the mighty, to accumulate the goods of life which had hitherto flowed easily through his fingers, and so to body forth his power in the visible splendour of possession—this had become his dream. He had recognized that its realization would take time, that he would have to settle down somewhere and abandon the immediate pursuit of easy satisfaction for a slow and patient climb, but these sacrifices he was prepared to make.

It was this plan for a larger and more effective self-assertion which had prompted him to resign from the employ of Thorne and Amherst and move to New York, and which had met with a sudden check in the duplicity of Emma.

3

When he had paid for his room at the hotel and tipped the boy who checked his baggage, he had just a little over four dollars left out of the ten. Why worry or hurry? On that amount he could live for three days if necessary by patronizing free lunch counters and cheap bed houses, and in three days something would undoubtedly turn up. He remembered that he had come to Washington chiefly as a sight-seer, and he resolved at once that he would have a look at the town before he did anything else.

He breakfasted a block from the hotel at the White House Lunch, which lived up to its name with a white tiled floor and white enameled tables and resembled the operating room of a hospital. It was manned by a single morose-looking Greek, who shouted Ralph's order through a little window and presently handed him across the counter, in exchange for fifteen cents, two egg sandwiches and a mug of weak but steaming coffee. Ralph devoured his breakfast with relish, not at all perturbed by the sudden change which the night had worked in his style of living. Then he set out upon a random walk.

It was a mid-morning in the early fall of 1912. The capital, seldom a lively town in the pre-war epoch, still had the air of languorous emptiness that generally characterizes it in hot weather. Ralph strolled down the Avenue, past the Treasury and into Jackson Square, where he paused for a look about. The beautiful park was empty save for a few nursemaids trundling their charges about, a couple of youngsters playing in a sand-pit and a bored-looking policeman draped over a railing about the central statue. On the streets were few passers-by. The White House, quiet and dignified among its groves, looked more like the seat of a gentleman farmer than the administrative centre of a nation. Indeed the quality of the whole scene was a sort of sleepy rural dignity, full of sunshine and greenery and the twitter of birds.

Ralph snorted in disgust. He had no appreciation of beauty for its own sake, and peace and quiet were qualities he held in low esteem. He was accustomed to appraise a city by the volume of its traffic and the amount of noise it made. There were just two kinds of towns in his estimation—the live and the dead—and this one he placed, on its first showing, decidedly among the dead.

As he continued his walk through the Northwest section, he saw nothing which inclined him to change his opinion. He found himself presently upon an avenue of impressive width, beautifully shaded by elms on either side that almost met above it. The houses that lined it were nearly all large and ornate. Most of the older ones were of red brick, of a complicated gothic structure, trimmed in brown stone, with arched and pillared porches and *portes-cochères,* and steep tiled roofs, and often they were richly dressed in the dark green of climbing ivy. Newer ones had plainly been built under the same influences that affected millionaire row on Fifth Avenue, being Greek in design and marble or imitation marble in material.

Some of these houses were truly palatial in size and extravagance, but the impressive thing about them was their emptiness. At least three-fourths of them showed no signs of occupancy, and a large proportion had their windows boarded or barred as though abandoned for a long time.

The whole neighbourhood had an air of desertion. Little traffic appeared on the street. Squirrels darted across it now and then, and pigeons cooed and nested in cornices and eaves. The sing-song voice of a negro street vender came melodiously across the silence. It seemed to Ralph that he had happened upon the dead bones of a city.

Many of these houses, Ralph learned later, had been built by rich men largely for the purpose of establishing a legal residence in Washington, where the low tax rate enabled them to save much money, and were occupied at that time just enough to satisfy the law.

Other causes had contributed to the prevailing desertion, too. One large marble structure, half buried in overgrown shrubbery, had been built by an ambitious mother to aid her daughter in the pursuit and capture of a titled foreign

diplomatic attaché. This purpose had been fulfilled in a single season and the house had never been occupied since. A great red brick smothered in ivy was the creation of a wealthy western senator, and the building of it had been a leading factor in his subsequent defeat. He had gone home in an effort to repair his political fortunes and had never returned.

Nearly all of the avenue was lined with this empty magnificence, but when he turned up a side street Ralph was surprised to find himself immediately in a negro quarter, as alive as the avenues were deserted, with pickaninnies playing in the streets and black housewives singing at their work and calling to each other from window and doorstep.

Wearied of this aimless exploration, Ralph found his way back to Pennsylvania Avenue and set out for the Capitol, which was visible nearly a mile away, its white dome towering impressively over a forested hill top. But the famous Avenue was even more of a disappointment to him than the residential section had been. Beyond the postoffice it degenerated steadily, and the last few blocks before the Capitol had all the look of a slum which had accidentally been built upon one of the widest streets in the world. Its buildings were mean brick structures two or four stories high, their flat, dirty faces set flush with the sidewalk. Many of them were bed houses, advertising rooms at twenty-five cents to seventy-five cents a day. The lower floors were occupied by little souvenir stores displaying in their windows an amazing variety of useless articles all somehow commemorative of the capitol, by photograph galleries where one had his picture taken before a back-drop on which the capitol dome was painted, by three-cent lunch counters, Chinese laundries and shops, gipsy fortune-telling booths, petty drug stores, and about two saloons to the block. Business

in all these establishments seemed dull. A few negroes loafing in the shade, and a few tourists going in and out of the souvenir stores were almost the only humans visible.

Having engaged a room and lunched on a ham sandwich and a glass of milk, Ralph proceeded to make a dreary inspection of the nation's legislative machine. He lost himself in the long, echoing corridors of the Capitol, he peered down into the green and mahogany pit of the Senate chamber where a senator held forth sonorously while a dozen of his colleagues dozed and read, he napped for a few minutes in a seat overlooking the larger but no less somnolent House of Representatives, he toured the hushed and ornate emptiness of the Library of Congress and emerged at last, sleepy, jaded, and somewhat discouraged. He loved the rush and noise and violence of American business life and here he missed it completely. He wondered what a man might do for a living in Washington if he were neither a congressman, a clerk nor a negro, and also what he might do for amusement if he had no taste for reading books in the Library of Congress or looking at objects of historical interest.

His way back in the afternoon happily lead along F Street, and there his spirits revived considerably. The government departments were pouring out their thousands of clerks, and it was also the fashionable shopping hour. For a while a really dense and lively crowd poured through this street. Its buildings were small and old-fashioned, but it was brightened by the colourful windows of a first-rate retail section, and by the presence of an astonishing number of pretty girls, most of whom strolled along aimlessly, often in long rows linked arm in arm, blocking the whole sidewalk.

Ralph was deeply interested in this parade, and he was

interested, too, in the expensive automobiles he saw, with uniformed chauffeurs at their wheels, for they were convincing evidence that wealth and luxury were about. Women and money—these were the things that charmed him, stirred his imagination and his senses.

A tall girl with bright blond hair and a fine provocative figure came out of a shop near which he was standing, and walked slowly toward a new green limousine parked at the curb, with a liveried man at its door. She walked slowly, with her chin in the air, and a slight swaggering roll about her hips. So close to Ralph she passed that he caught the scent of her, and the swish of silk. When she stepped into her car a shining shapely length of silken leg flashed for an instant out of her hobble skirt, like a beautiful weapon from a sheath. As the machine turned, her eyes rested briefly upon Ralph. Coolly, haughtily, she seemed to look over, through and beyond him. Then she turned away.

The trifling incident somehow made his blood jump with mingled emotions—desire, envy, ambition, resentment. Somehow he would have such a woman and such a car. To her and the like of her he was now a staring nobody on a street corner, but the time would come when they would stare at him. He would be one of them—a dominating one of them. He felt the stir of the power that was in him—of his cunning, his irrepressible self-assurance, his lusty peasant strength. He felt as though Washington had flung him a challenge in the person of this girl. Maybe he would stay in the town after all.

4

Drifting down the street he came to the Ebbitt Bar, the revolving door of which whirred steadily under the hands of an ingoing crowd. Within he found a long line of men,

each with a glass of beer in his hand, filing past a table behind which stood a white-jacketed negro carving an enormous smoking ham with a pile of sliced rye bread beside it. Ralph observed that those who left dimes upon the table received huge portions of the bread and meat, and he soon had one himself. As he sat in a corner munching it, with his second beer sliding pleasantly down his throat, he began to feel pleased with Washington and with himself. It was a funny town, he reflected, and a dead town in a way, but it was something new in his experience, and he was always interested in the new.

"I guess I'll try it a whirl," he decided.

CHAPTER TWO

I

The Circle Lunch was located on a street which marked a sharp dividing line between a white part of Washington and a black one. Around the corner in one direction was a fashionable residence district, with Dupont Circle only two blocks away, and the British Embassy only three or four. Around the opposite corner the population was solidly African, and there were drug stores, movie theatres, restaurants and bars which catered only to the coloured folk.

Along this street were three or four garages where the people of the Dupont Circle neighbourhood kept their cars, and also several taxicab establishments. The Circle Lunch existed by the patronage of the white employés in these places, for it was the only lunch in the vicinity that drew the colour line, and the only one that kept open all night.

Ralph came to it after a long and disheartening search of the help-wanted columns in the local papers. Apparently very little help of any kind was wanted in Washington. Most of the advertisements were for skilled artisans and house servants. "Bus-boy, white, Circle Lunch," was the only offering he had discovered that was at all within the reach of his abilities. Competition, fortunately, seemed as slack as demand. He was the only applicant for the place, and after a demonstration of his skill in carrying a pile of dishes, he was hired at eight dollars a week and his meals

to work from seven in the evening until seven in the morning.

The Circle Lunch belonged to all but the lowest order of Washington lunch rooms. It contained half a dozen white-topped tables, kept indifferently clean, a small steam table and a counter where an assortment of prunes, baked apples, bread pudding, sliced tomatoes, peaches and other such delicacies slowly dried and wilted away under the lazy, buzzing patrol of a small detachment of flies. A glass case contained chunks of cake, wedges of bakery pie and a great stack of beautiful brown doughnuts, case-hardened and soaked in grease as though to make them impervious to the hot coffee in which the patrons of the lunch liked to plunge them.

Behind the counter were two tall nickel-plated urns, one of coffee and the other of hot water, and a tank from which milk was slopped up with a long-handled dipper. The window was gladdened by a row of oranges and grapefruit, invitingly piled, and by a couple of rubber plants growing in green wooden buckets. "The Latest News" hung in a conspicuous place on the wall. Smoking was allowed, and there were several large and evidently well patronized spittoons. The personnel consisted of a couple of sweating negroes—cook and dishwasher—behind the scenes in the kitchen, a white man who presided over the counter and was also the general manager and cashier, and Ralph, whose task it was to gather up the used dishes and carry them to the kitchen.

He could have wished for a better place, but to his practical and unfastidious spirit this one was not altogether displeasing. His position had obvious advantages. Working in such an obscure place and at night, he was not apt to encounter any one who might later recognize him to his em-

barrassment or disadvantage. His duties were light for the place was never crowded, and he found the ham and eggs, the baked beans, beef stew and coffee about as good as the same viands in any other lunch room. He always put up with hardship easily because he knew it was only temporary and because his skin was thick.

The Circle Lunch, it soon became apparent, was something of a social institution as well as a dispensary of nourishment. The bars in that vicinity being all infested with negroes, the white chauffeurs and taxi-drivers, the several policemen who patrolled the negro quarter, and the few other whites who worked thereabouts, made the Circle their loafing place. A few of them would come in for their supper after Ralph went on duty, would linger over a second cup of coffee and a smoke, and would hold a session of story-telling and banter in which Ralph, and John Bushrod, the counter-man would freely join.

After this came a long dull period, with only an occasional customer. The really fashionable and exclusive social hour began at one o'clock, when the all-night employés of the garages came in for an early-morning meal. They were a small and select band, many of whom had been coming for years, and their gatherings had a fine air of good fellowship. The races and baseball and the prize fights were learnedly discussed, bets were made, stories were told. Often a couple of tables were pushed back and a crap game was started on the floor, usually with a ten-cent limit. Sometimes a fight took place, but as a rule the losers were good-natured, and borrowed car-fare and smokes from the winners.

Ralph was quickly recognized as a fit addition to this social group. He knew more and better stories than any one else, and he rolled the bones with a fine fervour and a wealth

of prayer and imprecation. Almost always he won, too, for he had both skill and shrewdness.

2

Meantime he had taken what steps he could toward finding a better job. One of the congressmen from Indiana, the Hon. Henry C. Murkle, was a former resident of Muncie and had been a friend of Ralph's father during the days when the elder Dolan was rated a wealthy citizen. Ralph had written to a friend at home for an introduction to this gentleman, and also for one to the representative from his own district, who was named Rickert. He did not know whether either of the men would or could do anything for him, but he was eager to make some contact with persons of official position, and these congressmen seemed to offer his only immediate opportunity of doing so.

He had also continued his search of the help-wanted columns, and this, at the end of his second week in the Circle Lunch, led to his employment as a collector of delinquent bills for the Washington Gas Company at a salary of twelve dollars a week. He also received commissions which brought his earnings the first week up to seventeen dollars.

He had been living in one of the cheap rooming houses on Pennsylvania Avenue, and on the strength of his enlarged income he determined to seek better quarters. Nor was he in any doubt where he would seek them. When in need of a clean but cheap place to live he always went to the Young Men's Christian Association. He had found that a connection with one of these institutions helped to identify him as an earnest and worthy young man who deserved to be helped. He liked the Turkish and the shower baths and the swimming pools with which these places were

equipped, and he had no objection to their somewhat faint odour of sanctity.

The secretary was absent from his office when Ralph called at the Association Building on G Street, and he spent a few minutes in the lobby picking over the leather-bound magazines on the tables and staring at the bulletin board. A sign there abjured him to "join a *live* Bible class in a *live* church," explaining that the City Methodist Church South offered not only religion but moving pictures and a chance to meet girls. An opportunity was advertised for some one with a tenor voice to join a choir, a correspondence course in short-story writing was offered second-hand at a bargain price, and there were solicitations for purchasers of used clothing, musical instruments and college text books. Close by was a large and brightly-coloured picture of a beautiful smiling young woman holding an infant in her arms, and under it the legend: "You expect them to be pure. Then see that your own life is clean!"

He stared at all this with the blank eyes of boredom. He had seen the like of it in fifty other places.

When the secretary came in, Ralph produced cards showing that he had been a member of Y. M. C. A.'s in Muncie, Pittsburgh and Chicago.

"I'm just making a start here," he explained. "I expect to study law later on, and I want a nice quiet place that won't cost me too much."

The secretary was favourably impressed and he had several empty rooms. He gave Ralph a blank to fill out, which placed on record the statement that he was unmarried, a salesman by profession, a Congregationalist by religious preference, and a member of the First Congregational Church of Muncie, Indiana. Actually, he had not been to

church for fifteen years, but he always put these statements into his applications at Y. M. C. A.'s in order to please the management.

He was sent to the basement where he stripped himself for a physical examination by a medical student, who seemed determined to discover some flaw in Ralph's remarkably sound corporation. The young man punched him, stethoscoped him, and tested his knee-jerks and his blood pressure with evident enjoyment, but without being able to discover any flaws. Finally he stood off and surveyed his victim.

"Your feet are flat," he pronounced suddenly.

"Like hell they are," Ralph retorted, taken unawares.

"We don't allow any profanity in here," said the doctor severely.

"Well, my feet aren't any flatter than yours are," Ralph contended. He felt that his feet were being deliberately insulted and he resented it. But the young doctor was resolute. It gave him a certain feeling of superiority to discover flaws in those he examined, and besides, he knew it to be a scientific fact that the human body after the age of eighteen is practically never perfect. Therefore Ralph, a trifle ruffled, had to go back to the desk bearing the stigma of flat-footedness.

The secretary quickly completed the matter of making him a member in full of the association.

"Do you believe that Jesus Christ is your saviour and redeemer?" he enquired in a business-like manner.

"Sure I do," Ralph responded cheerfully.

"Let us bow our heads in prayer," said the secretary.

Ralph covered his eyes with his hand and took a deep breath. When he looked up a moment later the secretary was making out his card.

"I was just thinking," the latter said, "that I have two

young men coming in this morning who signed up yesterday. They met here and agreed to room together, but the only large room I have is a very large one with three beds. They are very nice young men, thorough Christians, both of them, I believe. Perhaps you would like to join them. It would be very inexpensive."

Ralph, who preferred almost any sort of human society to being alone, readily agreed, and a little later he was making the acquaintance of Henry Lambert and William Cooley. The three of them were led to a large well-lighted corner room, furnished with three narrow beds, two bureaus, three chairs, and a bookcase. Its sparse and simple furniture and bare white walls gave it an almost monastic look, but it was clean and comfortable and much better in every way than anything else he could have gotten for the money, as Ralph observed to his satisfaction.

A slight constraint fell upon the three young men who had thus been placed upon terms of intimacy without any preliminary acquaintance. They sat around and smiled and made some remarks about the weather and the town. Ralph broke the ice.

"Well, fellows," he proposed, "let's flip a nickel to see who gets first pick of the beds and the bureau drawers."

This gamble was carried out with great good-nature and soon they were busily unpacking their belongings and telling each other their life histories.

Both of the others were younger than Ralph. Cooley, it transpired, was a native of New Jersey and had come to Washington only a few weeks before. He had a small clerkship in the Interior Department, and spent his leisure in studying osteopathy at a local school of that science. He had originally intended, he said, to become a doctor of medicine, but had changed to osteopathy because it was so much

more quickly learned, and was becoming so popular. He was a short, almost tow-headed man, with slightly prognathous jaw, and wore thick glasses and a grin of aggressive, self-assured cheerfulness. He contributed to the communal bookcase several thick texts of anatomy and osteopathy, a volume entitled "Sex Problems in Work and Worry," and another called "Will Power and How to Cultivate it."

Lambert presently added to this some fifteen or twenty volumes, to the evident surprise of his companions. His collection included "Three Plays for Puritans" by Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis," Balzac's "Droll Stories," "1001 Places to Sell Manuscripts" and "The Materials and Methods of Fiction" by Clayton Hamilton. He was a tall, lean man, a little unhealthy-looking and decidedly nervous, with a sharp cleft of irritation between his brows. His manner was abrupt and diffident, and he had much less to say than either of the others, but admitted that he hailed from Minnesota and was a reporter on a local afternoon newspaper.

3

It became apparent in a few days that these three men had little in common except youth and ambition. Partly by reason of that fact, perhaps, they lived together fairly peaceably. Both Ralph and Doc (as Cooley was now called) were good-natured, tolerant and polite. Henry Lambert, on the contrary, was irascible, awkward and uncomfortably plain-spoken. At the same time he exhibited a fine sense of justice, always apologized when he thought he had been in error, and bolstered up his demands with long and lawyer-like arguments which neither Ralph nor Doc could meet with any success. Their attitude toward him was a mixture

of admiration, contempt, and friendliness. They were impressed by his capacity for wading through many books, but they regarded this occupation as a bore and a waste of time.

"Henry's a nut all right," Doc observed one day when Lambert had just gone out with a great pile of books on his arm, bound for the Library of Congress.

"He's got wild ideas," Ralph agreed, "but he sure is a smart guy."

They were not long in discovering that Lambert was deeply and painfully in love with a girl who lived in Baltimore. He often went to that city at night, and returned on a milk train about three o'clock in the morning with face powder and blond hairs all over his shoulder and a light of exaltation in his eyes. Between these journeys his mood seemed to be wholly dominated by the arrival or non-arrival of certain small square letters. If he didn't receive one for several days he became more and more despondent, the cleft in his brow and the circles under his eyes steadily deepened, and it became dangerous to address him. He would haunt the vicinity of the mail box in the lobby. When the longed-for letter finally came, his spirits would flash up in boisterous delight.

His room-mates both made some effort to twit him about this attachment, but without success. He made no reply to any of their sallies, and when Doc offered some pleasantry of a ribald character, Henry looked so contagiously uncomfortable that the attempt was never repeated.

It was the same way with Henry's chief other absorption, his literary work. It became known that he was writing a play, and he often went back to the newspaper office at night to work on it, but he refused to divulge anything

of its nature, or to discuss it in any way. His girl and his play were the sacred precincts of his being and he held them safe from invasion. Yet, when in good spirits, he was a facile and long-winded talker. He had an amazing assortment of ideas on many subjects, chiefly very large and difficult ones, such as love, marriage, women, death, property and heredity. They were the undigested mental pabulum of a hungry-minded young man who read everything he could find and believed everything plausible he read, but to Doc and Ralph they seemed a remarkable display of erudition and vocabulary. Ralph, to whom life had never appeared for a moment as a subject for reflection or investigation, seldom made any comment or reply. He would listen as long as he found Henry's discourse entertaining, and when it became too deep for him he would turn his attention to the Cosmopolitan Magazine (where he was following the adventures of his favourite hero, Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford), or else go quietly to sleep.

Doc was not such a docile listener. He had some ideas of his own and he held them with great tenacity. He and Henry clashed especially, to the great delight of Ralph, on the ancient question of whether heredity or environment most determines the destiny of man. Doc was fully convinced that in a great free republic, such as the United States, a man of average intelligence may achieve almost anything he aspires to if only he is diligent. This idea had doubtless been implanted in his mind at an early age by the teachings of the public schools, which often interpret the national heroes as men of humble origin and endowment who rose by pluck and effort. But it was sustained now chiefly by the advertisements, in his favourite magazines, of correspondence courses and other methods of self-improvement.

He had already patronized two of these. One of them had guaranteed to make him a master of English in fifteen minutes a day, and the other to endow him with the awful power of remembering for life every face and fact he encountered. He was always thinking of taking up some of the others and their long and eloquent advertisements were his favourite reading. Indeed although he did not realize it, these advertisements were his Bible. They cleverly nourished his faith that the world could withhold from him nothing he wanted if he but worked hard and had patience.

"You know in your heart how big a man you are," one of them told him.

"Are you going ahead in a big way?" another challenged. "It all depends upon what you do with your spare time."

"New minds for Old," was the brave offer of another system, which was having an enormous vogue.

"There is nothing exceptional about these men," he was assured by the inventor of a scheme through which hundreds had made their fortunes.

That indeed was the sweet burden of them all. They told how common men like himself had risen to wealth and fame. "And you can do it too," they assured him. There was no career from chiropody to literature they did not offer him. There was no handicap they could not overcome. Was he a boorish fellow? They would teach him the secrets of etiquette so that he might mingle with peers and millionaires without reproach. Did he lack conversation? They would fit him to talk of more divers things than the Walrus ever thought of. Did he wish to entertain? They would teach him to play the piano by ear in ninety days. Was he a puny fellow? They would show him how

to grow bulging muscles like the pictured man with the leopard skin about his middle. Did he lack power in the crucial tests of love? They would endow him with the puissant and fertile loins. Cogently, plausibly, offering proof to all and money back to the dissatisfied, they preached that a resolute man may make himself over in the image of power and success.

Doc never referred to any of these advertisements, and his reading of them was somewhat furtive, but their central dogma he would defend with heat.

"That's all poppycock about genius and talent," he asserted one night, apropos of an exposition by Henry of Havelock Ellis' theory of genius. "Look at any of the big men in this country. Look at Rockefeller, Schwab, Russel Sage, Edison. What were they? They were ordinary poor guys, and they worked hard and studied and saved money and used common sense. That's all there is to it. . . ."

"Go on, go on!" Henry interrupted irritably. "You'll be telling us next about Abraham Lincoln, and how he lay on his belly in front of the fire and studied and that's why he was a great man. . . . Can't you see that you might lie on your belly and study till it wore out and you wouldn't be any more of an Abraham Lincoln than you are now? And it wouldn't make a darn bit of difference what you studied either."

"That's all right," Doc replied with a serene disregard of exact logic. "I don't want to be any Abraham Lincoln. I want to be an osteopath catering to a fashionable trade and have a nice warm little girl for a wife. Watch me! That's all that I say. I can't argue but I can demonstrate."

Henry uttered an explosive epithet of disgust, and returned to the perusal of Madame Bovary. Doc privately

awarded himself the palm of victory. Ralph laughed with delight.

4

While Doc and Henry devoted their leisure to preparation for their careers, Ralph pursued more immediate ends.

The first time that he sent out his laundry through the regular channels provided by the Y. M. C. A., he noticed that the bill for it was a trifle high, and immediately guessed that the institution made a slight profit on the house laundry as a return for gathering it up and distributing it again. Forthwith he made a canvass of nearby laundries and found one that was willing to do work at a low rate on a poundage basis provided he turned in at least fifty pounds a week. He at once organized a laundry syndicate, beginning with Doc and Henry, and took away from the management nearly one-half of its business. This enabled him to earn about eight dollars a week in a single afternoon. The management instituted an investigation and found out what had happened, but it could not protest. The men had a right to send their laundry where they pleased. Ralph was frowned upon by the general secretary, but he endured this displeasure with equanimity.

He also managed to make his evenings profitable by spending them in a nearby pool room. He devoted three evenings to a careful study of the regular patrons of the place, and identified all of those whom he was sure he could beat before he ever offered to play a game. He always played rather badly at first, so as to encourage his victim, and always won by a spurt at the end of the game.

He also took thought of his wardrobe, and in replenishing this he made his connection with the Y. M. C. A. serve

in lieu of cash payments. He would walk into a shoe store with an air of leisured dignity which he had found to be effective in such places, and would look over a great assortment of the most expensive shoes. He always dressed carefully and carried a cane when he was shopping. Having finally selected a pair of shoes that suited him he would tap them negligently with the stick and say in a most casual way:

"Send them up to the Y. M. C. A. for Mr. Dolan. They will understand." Then he would walk out.

One store awkwardly tried to collect at the desk and another did not make the delivery at all, but the third sent the shoes and a bill at the end of the month. Ralph put this in the waste basket. He would pay it when and if he must. The same method supplied him with neckties and shirts.

In such matters he felt that it was for the retailer to look after his own interests. In fact, that was his attitude toward all except his immediate friends. If he borrowed fifteen cents from Doc or Henry he entered the amount in a little note book and always repaid it as soon as he could.

CHAPTER THREE

I

At night Ralph was generally left to his own devices, for Henry was apt to be reading or at work on his play or visiting his girl in Baltimore, while Doc was studying osteopathy or improving his memory and his command of English.

On Saturday night, however, the three of them usually united for an evening of convivial pleasure. They had a standardized program of dissipation, which, in that unregenerate day before the war, was followed by millions of Americans every Saturday night, just as regularly as many of them went to church the next morning. They would wander among the saloons and cafés, drinking beer, nibbling pickled herrings and cheese and crackers until about eleven o'clock, and then they would adjourn to Hooker's Division, as the Washington Tenderloin was called.

Ralph was almost always the one to propose this plunge into the underworld, and Doc almost invariably demurred.

"Well, now, I don't mind going down there and putting a nickel in the piano and shaking a foot with the girls," he would protest. "But I'm not going to hang up in any of those joints—damned if I do! It ain't safe."

Yet often, under the influence of beer and music, he yielded to temptation and always he awakened the next morning in an agony of remorse and fear. He would surround himself with remedies, despite Ralph's merciless gib-

ing, and would not wholly regain his peace of mind until the lapse of time had convinced him that he was safe. He would then always resolve upon a better life, for he was at heart a moral man as well as a prudent one. He believed firmly in the sanctity of marriage. When he had a touch of indigestion to which he was subject, a more pure-hearted man could not be found. The lectures in the Y. M. C. A. lobby on the perils of sin, which he always attended, likewise had the effect of inducing in him a mood of stern and orthodox morality. And yet, strolling down F street on a fine afternoon, he would show a grinning interest in ankles, he would roar at Ralph's ribald stories and would let it be known that in his home town in New Jersey he had been considered something of a menace to good women. When he was in such a mood a few drinks and a simple tune always meant a triumph for the Devil. But his repentance was touching and profound. His elaborate prophylactic precautions were really a symbolical ablution, in which he washed the stains of sin off his soul.

Henry displayed a somewhat fastidious and disdainful attitude toward these Saturday night expeditions. He almost always went along, but sought to create the impression that he was interested chiefly as a professional observer of life who must not overlook its seamy side. Only Ralph was frankly enthusiastic and eager. He had roamed the Tenderloins of most of the large American cities in those days before the rise of vice-crusading, when every town of more than a thousand souls had its recognized and protected prostitution. San Francisco's Barbary Coast, the vast and polyglot harlotry of New Orleans, the dives and dens of the Bowery, the ornate brothels of St. Louis and other middle-western cities—he knew them all, and he relished their noisy, brutal revelries. Hooker's Division

was to him an island of familiar gaiety in a sea of dulness. He sniffed the smell of stale beer and harkened to the clatter of syncopated music with reminiscent delight.

Washington, although then somewhat deficient in most forms of public amusement, had a large bi-racial red-light district, conveniently located near the centre of the city, just off Pennsylvania Avenue and directly behind the tower-topped grey mass of the Postoffice building. When the theatres and cafés had closed, these half-darkened streets were crowded with bands of tipsy revellers roaming from house to house, often turned away from the doors for lack of room. Ralph and his companions would go the rounds, buying drinks to pay for their entertainment, dancing with the girls and moving on again.

In time the three came to give their patronage mostly to one establishment, known as Mrs. Barker's, which had an especially good reputation for its cleanliness and order. Mrs. Barker's was an excellent specimen of a "protected" house—an institution which long played a vital though obscure part in the life of every American community—and as such it deserves to be described. Its proprietress was an extremely able woman, well past sixty years of age. With her bony frame, severe grey hair and spectacles, she bore an incongruous resemblance to a stage representaion of a New England spinster. She was proud of the reputation of her establishment and of the excellent police protection it enjoyed, and she ruled her ten girls as strictly as though they had been the inmates of a house of correction. They were never allowed to come down stairs in their kimonos or to swear or to make too much noise. When callers arrived Mrs. Barker herself would receive them, very graciously, and then she would go to the foot of the stairs.

"Ladi-e-e-e-s!" she would call sweetly. "Gentlemen

here!" And the ladies would all come trooping down in evening dress.

Drunkenness was strictly prohibited at Mrs. Barker's, and any vehement display of convivial feeling in the parlour was apt to bring from her a discreet reprimand.

By practice of these excellent methods Mrs. Barker had acquired a regular clientele of a good class, including several congressmen of whom she was especially proud. She called many of her old patrons by their first names. When one was about to go home after a sociable evening, she always gave him a cigar, wished him a polite good-night and invited him to call again soon. The atmosphere of her place was not only homelike, but almost moral.

Her parlour, in keeping with all this, was neat and respectable-looking, with its heavy furniture upholstered in red plush, its thick large-figured carpet, its silk-shaded lamp and discreetly heavy curtains. Behind it was a slightly larger room with a hard-wood floor suitable for dancing, and a mechanical piano which gave birth to melody when fertilized with a coin.

Mrs. Barker had gathered about her a group of women who were carefully chosen for looks, but extremely various in other ways. Elsa Lipowska was a large bovine Polish woman with eyes like a Jersey heifer and a mind not more than ten years old. She had slipped into her profession soon after passing Ellis Island and had only a limited command of English. A sharp contrast to her was Gladys Weston, a rosy Connecticut girl with twinkly blue eyes that easily kindled into fires of battle. She was betrothed to a cook in the Navy who came and spent the day with her whenever he was in port, and at such times Gladys was not accessible. Both she and her fiancé were saving money, and as soon as enough capital had accumulated they were

going to open a bakery shop and settle down to respectable money-making.

Especially friendly to our three young heroes was Florence Pindell, the daughter of a lock-keeper on the Chesapeake and Potomac Canal near Washington. She was a large lazy blond with a coarse prettiness and a pleasant drawling voice. This life pleased her extremely well, for the women of her class and neighbourhood were toil-ridden creatures, broken down by child-bearing, and she considered that she had been lucky to escape from such a fate into one of ease and comparative affluence. Her laziness, doubtless a half-conscious revolt against generations of toil, was something magnificent. She would not even walk across the room if she could avoid it, and seldom stirred outside of the house except in a cab. But she went to visit her friends and relations in the country almost every Sunday, and was always buying gaudy presents for them.

One evening Ralph was at the house soon after her return from such a visit, and she called him aside in a confidential fashion.

"I've got a little girl, cousin of mine, coming from the country to visit me next week," she told him. "Maybe she'll stay. I hope she will. I want her to meet some real nice boys, so she'll like it. S'pose you come around kind of early next Wednesday, before the crowd, and bring your two friends along with you."

This tale about an innocent little girl from the country was familiar bait, and the three agreed that the country cousin would probably prove to be an old stager. They were pleasantly suprised, therefore, to find Helen Hobart apparently all that had been claimed for her. She was slim, shy and awkward, dressed in starchy white, such as country girls usually wear on Sundays, with shining new patent leather

slippers. Her face was remarkably pretty, with a china-white complexion, a large amount of dark brown hair and long, narrow, sly-looking eyes. She was excited, eager and confused, exactly like a *débutante* at her first ball. It was evident that this was an important and thrilling occasion in her life, to which she had long looked forward.

Henry Lambert, the student of human nature, was immensely interested. Here, he felt, was a situation pregnant with drama—a young and pretty woman plunging into a life of shame. At the first opportunity he began to question her.

"Are you going to stay here?" he asked her.

"Sure I am," she responded enthusiastically. "I am if I can make good, and Florence says she thinks I can."

"But why do you want to?" Henry demanded. "What made you come?"

"What made me come?" she countered in some suprise. "Nothing made me come. I always wanted to. . . . There's good money in it. Florence makes a lot of money."

Henry was disappointed. She was evidently not so innocent after all. But he pursued the story relentlessly. He wanted to know how she first happened to go astray. Without the slightest embarrassment she gave him a detailed account of her fall at the age of fourteen. It had evidently been a most undramatic affair and had made but little impression on her. In fact, her story did not in any way conform to the literary traditions in such matters, greatly to Henry's disgust. He was eager above all to understand her motives, but as far as he could discover she did not have any.

"Why didn't you get married?" he enquired, by way of taking a new tack.

"I did get married," she explained. "I've been married

a couple of years, but I haven't lived with my husband lately."

"Tell me about your husband," Henry requested.

"Well, his name is Jack Hobart and he's a big mule skinner that works a canal boat from Cumberland to Washington. He can drink more corn licker than any man I ever seen, and when he gets drunk he always wants to fight. He used to break up most every dance we ever had around Seneca. And yet he's a great hand for religion, too. He goes to camp meetings and howls like a dog. I ain't got a bit of use for him."

"Well, why did you marry him then?"

"Lord, you got more 'whys' in you than any man I ever seen. I think you got awful cute hair, though. I hope you come and see me often."

"Thanks," said Henry. "I will if you'll tell me why you married this man."

"Well, because I was scared and didn't have any better sense, I reckon," she told him. "Every time any other man came to see me Jack used to throw stones at the house, and when the other man came out Jack would beat him up. After a while nobody else would come around, so I married Jack and went on the boat with him, but it was a dog's life. Every time he got drunk he'd hit me a crack and then go to sleep, and I would have to run the boat. So I went back home."

"Does he know you've come here?"

"Yeah. He knows I come to town, and he's told it around that he's going to find me and bring me back, and if I won't come he'll kill me. 'Course he was drunk when he said that. I reckon he'll get running around with some other woman and forget all about me. I hope he will."

Doc and Ralph and the women had all gathered around

and listened to this colloquy with grins. Now Ralph suddenly walked over to Helen and picked her up in his arms. It was the beginning of a lasting attachment between the two. Ralph became Helen's duly recognized "friend." It was a familiar rôle to him. He had a sure and confident way with women.

CHAPTER FOUR

I

In the afternoon, when the trio were not engaged upon their several enterprises, they amused themselves pleasantly enough. They played tennis on some courts provided by the Y. M. C. A., and swam in the pool in its basement. They loafed along F Street, regaling themselves with beer and free lunches and trying to flirt with the girls. On Saturdays and Sundays they often journeyed to some of the many "points of interest" which make Washington such a happy hunting ground for the sight-seer. They ascended the Washington monument, visited Arlington and Mount Vernon and the Zoo, and tramped through miles of museum corridors, and saw nearly all of the government departments.

Doc was the leading enthusiast in this diversion. Ralph's powers of attention were soon exhausted. After he had marched past about a quarter of a mile of stuffed birds in glass cases at the National Museum, he felt wholly unable to inspect any more of the wonders of nature that day, and went outside to take a smoke. But Doc saw the Museum all the way through, from insects to dinosaurs, carefully reading every label and all of the information printed on little cards. He never missed any opportunity to improve his mind.

Henry followed him, but was a good deal less conscien-

tious, viewing things with the casual, selective eye of an artist, pausing only when his attention was caught by some beauty of form or colour.

At Mount Vernon Doc again showed himself a determined and inquisitive investigator. He took little interest in the dignified beauty of the place or in the splendid view it commanded of the blue river and wooded hills, but he was deeply impressed by the total absence from the mansion of anything resembling a bathroom or toilet.

"Old George put on a lot of dog here in some ways," he observed, "but when it comes to downright comfort, I'll take the Y. M. C. A."

It gave him considerable satisfaction to feel that the Colonial aristocracy, with all its grandeur and pomp, had been in some sense less well off than he was.

An old attendant in a tarnished Civil War uniform gave them an eloquent account of the place as it must have been in George's day and described the sumptuous style in which the General had lived, with as much personal pride as though he had shared in it.

"But he didn't have any bathroom, did he?" Doc interrupted to ask.

The old man hesitated for a moment in evident embarrassment, as though the idea were wholly new and somewhat disturbing to him. Then he waved his hand toward the wide sweep of woods and water that lay at the foot of the hill.

"George Washington didn't need any bathroom," he explained. "He owned eleven miles of the Potomac River!"

2

Another day the three of them went to Arlington, and after trooping through General Lee's one-time residence

with a crowd of honeymooners and sight-seers, went out and sat on the veranda, which commanded a striking view of the whole city. It was beautiful in the bright sunlight with its spider web of streets and its great white buildings half buried in foliage.

"It's a fine old town," Doc opined, with a touch of sentiment in his voice. "Where else would young fellows like us find such advantages—schools, libraries, important people, an easy way to make a living while we get a start. By Golly, I'm glad I came here!"

This outburst was admirably calculated to provoke the all-disapproving Henry.

"You can have it!" he exclaimed. "I'll grant you the library is good. For the rest, it's nothing but a mob of niggers and clerks and congressmen. It's easy enough to make a living here. That's true. In fact, the place is a sort of a soft-job paradise for boneheads. When they can't make a living at home they come to Washington and get a government job. Same way in society. The bounders that can't break in anywhere else come to Washington. We've got the scum of the country here, that's what we've got! For a national capital it's a disgrace. There isn't a decent play or a good concert once in two months. It's nothing but a big village spread out thin!"

Ralph laughed in delight. Henry's tirades were to him like good vaudeville, and he cared nothing about the issue involved. But Doc was irritated.

"Why don't you get out of here if you find it so rotten?" he demanded curtly.

"I don't know," Henry admitted more mildly. "I guess the library's one reason why I stay, and I guess lack of initiative is another." He might have added that a girl was the third.

3

Arlington and Mount Vernon and the other relics of Colonial days that had been preserved about Washington were among Henry Lambert's favourite haunts. He liked to go to them alone on days when they were not crowded, and to try to reconstruct in imagination the vanished times when fine gentlemen and beautiful ladies had lived in these dignified mansions—when life, as he conceived it, had been stately and colourful and leisured. A sensitive, imaginative man with the tastes and aptitudes of an artist, he hungered after beauty and was starved. Like all young aesthetes, he was unable to discover beauty in the realities about him save in fleeting glimpses of form and colour. As a multitude of dreamers had done before him, he turned his fancy backward and sought to create beauty out of the scanty and fabulous materials of the past. He had dreamed of a great poetic drama in which he should make the heroic days of America's beginning live again. Scenes of charm and splendour haunted his brain like beautiful ghosts, and when he sought to realize them on paper they became long rows of words among which he futilely toiled, losing his dream in a chaos of rhetoric and syntax. From this effort he turned, exhausted, to write for his bread about meetings of citizens' associations where paving and sewers were discussed, about negro brawls, about political parades and speeches and real-estate deals and a hundred other things he hated. Indeed, he hated all of the life about him because it did not nourish his imagination and because it provided no outlet for the creative power he felt within him. He was painfully pregnant with poetry he could not utter.

And he was lonely with the loneliness of a complete intellectual isolation. He had found in Washington no single

person who could share his dream—to whom he could talk of his longings and hatreds. Doc and Ralph were fair specimens of his social environment, and they could give him no more intellectual companionship than a couple of Indians.

In these circumstances he longed for love no less than he longed for beauty. Indeed, he knew of profound intuition that the two were somehow linked together. The stir of desire in his body made music and colour in his brain. He dreamed of a conquest lovely and ineffable—of a union of spirits that would bring absolute peace. And desire led him to the smell of spilled beer and the jangle of cheap pianos and fat blowsy women whom he loathed.

In only one place it seemed to him that he had glimpsed beauty and love concrete and attainable, and that was in the eyes of the girl in Baltimore. If only he could possess her he felt that he would indeed have fulfilled desire of body and of soul. But he was too poor yet to marry and he lived in a jealous fear that some one would take her away from him. His hands trembled in eagerness when he opened her letters and he approached her doorstep with hope and fear gripping painfully at his vitals.

Never did he suspect that the promise he saw in her eyes of release from his wretchedness was as much a thing of his own creation as the phantoms of grace and beauty which he sought to capture in words.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

With several letters of introduction in his pocket, with a carefully considered plan running through his head and with a feeling of mingled assurance and trepidation, Ralph approached the great flat marble chunk of the House Office Building to try his political fortunes.

He was extremely eager to get a political place of some kind, and to make some contact with persons of position and influence, however slight that contact might be at first. Ever since coming to Washington he had been more and more impressed by the fact that the government is an institution from which a great deal of money flows forth under very slight pressure in the way of work. He had never realized before what an enormous creature the government is. It fed thousands, he saw, in Washington alone. And every year it gave birth to a litter of subsidiary creatures,—commissions, committees, associations, boards, bureaus. Some of them were parts of the government and some of them were designed to influence its action. All of them afforded employment.

Most of the workers in the government and its accessories were poor clerks, to be sure, but clever men, he knew, prospered greatly and suddenly. The town was full of the gossip of spectacular rises in life achieved through the friendship of influential men, of fortunes mysteriously made, of fabulous salaries paid to lobbyists and press agents.

Money was here—tons of it—and it was not half so carefully guarded as the wealth of the business world. That much was clear to Ralph. He was determined to serve his country.

He was creative, as are most men, only in a primitive and material way. Tied to the soil he would have raised corn and pork as his grandfather had done, and so would have contributed his mite to the social good. But the generous tides of Democracy had floated him away from all direct contact with the soil. He had been given a thing called an education and dressed in the white collar of physical leisure. In theory he was a man of ideas. But he had no ideas except those that originated in his belly. He could not serve an abstraction sincerely because he could not grasp one. Like most of the thousands who inhabit it, he could bring to the world of government only the hunger and cunning of the purely acquisitive man. It was to him a jungle where he would hunt, and where the hunting promised to be good.

2

After travelling several hundred yards of white and empty corridor he found the office of the Hon. Charles A. Rickert of Indiana. It was a good deal less elaborate than he had expected. The green carpet, the white walls, high ceiling and mahogany furniture gave it a certain dignity, but it consisted of only one room which was badly cluttered with papers, books, bills, filing cases and a comely young woman furiously at work on a typewriter. The legislator himself was half concealed by a green curtain strung across the back of the office, but his full oratorical voice was perfectly audible as he told a visiting constituent, with excellent effect, a story about two Irishmen.

Congressman Rickert was a pleasing gentleman to look

upon, with a goodly bulk, a ruddy face and the slightly bulging eyes of the man of talk. He received Ralph with a rich and unctuous cordiality that put the young man at his ease immediately.

"Well, well, well! so you're the son of John Dolan. Know him? I should say I did know him. He was one of my best friends. John and I put in some rare days together. I'm glad to know you and I'm glad to see you in Washington. If there's ever anything I can do for you, call on me without hesitation."

Thank you," said Ralph. "You might be able to help me. You see, I've come here to study law, perhaps to get into politics, to see if I can do something worth while. I've been a salesman for the past five years, and I've done pretty well at it in a financial way, but I'm not satisfied. I want to do something . . . well, a little bigger. My father was a good Republican and helped the party all he could, and I want to do my share, too . . . I thought perhaps you could help me to get some small place here . . . just anything that would pay expenses, you understand . . . I'm new to the town. . . . "

"That's fine," the Congressman interrupted, rolling the words lovingly in his rich baritone. "That's bully! I like to see a young man have ambition, and Washington is the place for him to come. I'm sure you'll find opportunity here. As for a place, I don't believe there is one vacant in my patronage just now, but you shall hear from me the very first time there is . . . the very first time . . ."

On this flood of sweet words Ralph found himself carried to the door and through it, with the Congressman's kindly hand upon his shoulder and the rich voice caressing him like an unguent.

"Good-bye, my boy, good-bye! And remember, when-

ever I can be of any service, just call on me here."

A very different man in every way was the Hon. Henry C. Murkle. He represented a rural constituency, and like most legislators of that kind, he affected a somewhat rural appearance, with large dusty shoes, unfashionable clothes and steel spectacles. He did an enormous business in farmers' bulletins, seeds and bulbs, and his room looked like a warehouse. His secretary, a perspiring young man in his shirt sleeves, was dragging huge canvas mail sacks through the door and piling them in the corridor when Ralph arrived.

"Well, young man, what'll you have?" he enquired shortly.

Ralph repeated his plea for a job, somewhat less fulsomely, feeling that there was little chance of success here. But the Congressman surprised him.

"I've got a small place vacant in my patronage in the folding room," he explained. "The young man that held it has taken a job as secretary. I'll let you have it if you'll come up here and help with the mail once in a while. I think I could arrange with Mr. Folard, superintendent of the folding room, to let you off early, so that what you did here wouldn't take much of your time away from you. Besides, the work in my office would give you some experience in handling mail, and it might lead to a job as secretary to some congressman when the new administration comes in next spring. . . . You see, we congressmen are poor cusses," he added apologetically.

3

The folding room was a long narrow compartment in the basement of the House Office Building, with rough walls

and a cement floor, provided with long tables of unpainted lumber and high stools. It looked more like a factory than an office. Its atmosphere was dank, and the small high windows up against the ceiling gave so little light that electricity was kept burning all the time. Here the printed speeches of congressmen were folded, placed in envelopes, and sacked for mailing to their constituents.

The amount of this printed oratory was a thing to appal. Speeches bound into bales were piled to the very ceiling. Other bales were always being hauled in on hand trucks, which went back loaded with tons of speeches folded, sacked and ready for shipment. At the long tables sat rows of men in their shirt sleeves, folding speeches and putting them into envelopes with swift deft movements. They were the very lowest grades of patronage employés—the minor faithful ones, rewarded with these positions at seventy-five dollars a month for work at the polls, for marching in political processions and whooping and clapping at political meetings and conventions. Here in the very bowels of government they toiled, stirring futilely and incessantly, like colon-bacilli, among its profuse excretions.

Mr. Folard, superintendant of the folding room, to whom Ralph reported for duty, was a man whose politeness, discretion and equability of temper should have won him some higher reward in the game of politics where those virtues are so important. A stout man with a large, concealing grey moustache, he resembled nothing so much as a country undertaker. He always wore black clothes and a black derby hat, which he seemed never to remove. It was a favourite pleasantry of the folding room to speculate as to whether he slept in it. He moved about silently on rubber heels, and when speaking to an employé always laid a

hand upon his shoulder and addressed him in a low confidential tone as "my boy." Ralph learned that Mr. Folard had been appointed to his position many years ago under a Democratic administration, and had held it throughout the long Republican régime by reason of his diplomatic bearing toward the Republican congressmen. Any one of them might demand his head at any moment, so that this position could be given to a deserving Republican. Mr. Folard had a large family to feed and had developed his manner of extreme politeness and care in self-defence. He seemed to feel that any slight jar of movement or utterance on his part might precipitate a political explosion which would blow him out of his berth.

Ralph reported his appointment to this gentleman and did not neglect to mention the fact that Congressman Murkle had said he would be able to get off early whenever he pleased.

"Yes, my boy. Surely, my boy," muttered Mr. Folard, glancing cautiously about. "Just come quietly to me when you want to go, but don't say anything about it to any of the others. Just come quietly to me."

He softly led Ralph to one of the tables and in his confidential, fatherly manner directed a man to teach him how to fold speeches.

This art has a nice technique which has been perfected through years of experience. Skilled employés had made marvellous records running into thousands of speeches folded a day. These experts were in demand in the offices of congressmen, where they worked by piece, and some of them thus made substantial amounts at night and during the noon hour.

Ralph found the work extremely tedious and difficult at first, and his back ached at night as the result of hours spent

perching on a high stool, but in a few weeks he was able to fold and fill with unconscious ease and his muscles became adjusted to all the movements and positions.

4

William O'Rourke, who worked across the table from Ralph, was a large, red-faced, snub-nosed Irishman with combative-looking eyes, who had been a walking delegate in some labour union and had so gathered the small amount of political prestige necessary to obtain his position in the folding room. He was the exponent of a sort of muddled socialism, and freely gave Ralph the benefit of his ideas.

"I've had about enough of capitalistic control, for my part," he would say. "I think it's about time to give the workers a chance to rule. I'm a workman and I'm proud of it. I suppose I'll get canned out of this place sooner or later for my radicalism, but I don't give a damn. I can make more working for the old union. I only stay here because my wife likes Washington."

Like nearly all of the folding room employés, he dressed somewhat formally, wearing a stiff collar and a hard hat, making it perfectly clear to all, in spite of his love of the labouring class, that he was a gentleman holding a political job.

Abner Johnson was even more punctilious in matters of dress, always carrying a cane and wearing a silk handkerchief in his upper coat pocket. Being a bachelor and the most expert folder in the room he had a great deal of money to spend upon himself. In private life he had been a piano tuner, and like most men of that profession he was of a nervous, sensitive type. His beady eyes had a curious way of roaming from side to side of his head. The pupils would move slowly over to one corner and then jerk sud-

denly back, only to begin their travels all over again. Ralph used to watch them in fascination. It was difficult to understand how the man kept his vision focused on his work, and yet he must have done so, for he performed it with the speed and precision of a prestidigitator. He was withal a very happy man, for his work seemed completely to occupy and satisfy his mind. When working at top speed he passed into a sort of trance and would often fail to hear when he was addressed. His evenings were spent pleasantly, too, for he was a great joiner of secret societies, always going to smokers and initiations. His bearing was proud, complacent and a little truculent. A Methodist of an old Virginia stock, he was very contemptuous of Jews, Catholics, negroes, and the foreign-born.

"We Americans have got to stick together," he would say. "If we are going to keep control of this country. That's why I believe in fraternal organization and give so much of my time to it. We've got to organize against all these wops and tallies and Jews or they'll run us out of the country."

Jim Duval, who sat next to Ralph, would listen to such remarks as this with a sort of wry and weary smile. He was a small, dark wiry man who came from Colorado, and claimed to have Indian blood in his veins. Unlike most of his fellow workers he wore a wide Stetson hat and a soft collar. This style of dress was to him a sort of loving commemoration of the fact that he had once been a cowpuncher and ridden a horse and done "man's work." For he despised the Folding Room and its business.

"By God!" he exclaimed one day as he sacked his last thousand speeches and took down his coat in preparation for going home. "I'd like to get out on a farm and handle good hard dirt that makes the corn grow instead of all this

stuff. What're all these speeches about anyhow? I'm gonna set down and read one some time. Durned if I believe anybody ever does it. Did you ever happen on a man settin' before the fire readin' the speeches he got from his congressman? Durned if I ever did."

He was the victim of a passionate homesickness. As autumn declined into winter he would regale his fellow workers with wistful accounts of his life in the west as it had been at the same season of the year.

"The old man's just about cuttin' the last crop of alfalfa on the ranch now," he would remark, apropos of nothing. "Ever work in the hay fields, boys? It's nice work, I'm here to tell you. The stuff smells sweet and the sun shines and you get up a good sweat. And some hungry! O boys! And then you pitch into a nice big steak cut off a two-year-old and a couple of big boiled potatoes and a chunk of apple pie and about three cups of coffee. You git somep'n to eat out in that country. At the boardin' house where I live here they give you such a little piece of meat you can hardly catch it on a fork. No wonder I ain't got my usual strength. They don't give you no red meat."

And a little later:

"Well, boys, I see by the paper they've got snow out home. I can just see them mountains turnin' white and smell that cold damp air. When th' first snow come I always used to take a rifle and go up in the hills and get on the track of a big buck or a bunch of turkeys. It was damn seldom I didn't bring in the meat, too. O boys! That's the life! This here ain't livin'. A man wasn't never intended to set in a coop like this and play with little pieces of paper."

"If you liked the life back there in the tall timber so

much, what did you come to Washington for?" Abner Johnson asked him one day.

"I often ask myself that question," Duval replied. "Y'see, I knew the Congressman—worked for him—and when election time come, I rustled around among the boys and got a bunch of 'em to ride into Alamosa and vote for him. He appreciated it a lot, and he ast me how would I like to go to Washington and have a gov'ment job. He told me I'd git seventy-five a month, and make more on the side. I was holdin' down a homestead and raisin' a little hay and potatoes and punchin' cattle for fifty bucks a month. So it looked pretty good to me from there. And my wife she jumped at it. Once she heard about it, the thing was as good as settled. . . . By Golly, I wish this here rain would let up for a while. I ain't got no use for a country where it rains all the time. Fast as I git shet of one cold I ketch another. I got a cold all the time. The doc he says I ought to go and have my lungs examined, but I ain't gonna do no such a damn thing. I know if I can get back to the dry country I'll be all right, and if I can't I ain't gonna be no good nohow."

"Why can't you get back there?" Ralph asked.

"Ain't got the money, that's why. It costs a pile of money for me and my family to get to Colorado. I'm workin' here till near midnight every night foldin' speeches in congressmen's offices tryin' to make enough so's I can move, and every time I git a few dollars ahead, somep'n happens to it. First Mary—that's my wife—she ups and has another kid on me. And then my boy, he had typhoid. And it costs so damn much to live here and go to the movies and get your shoes shined and all like that. But if I have luck I'll make it by spring. . . ."

Duval's fight to return to the west became more and more a matter of general interest in the office. He towered above his fellows as does always the man who battles against destiny instead of submitting to it. He came to the folding room hollow-eyed and shaky from long sessions of night work, and his thin body shook with a chronic cough, but he was game and cheerful. Mr. Folard let him off early, reducing his stint to a minimum so that he would have more time for extra work. Abner Johnson, when he found out that Duval was a Mason, insisted on doing a thousand speeches for him now and then, and some of the others followed suit.

"You fellows are sure good to me," he told them gratefully. "I've got damn near a hundred dollars in the bank now. If I can jest hold out till spring I'll get back to the ranch in time to put in a crop of spuds, and that's all I ask."

Came the inevitable day in the midst of Washington's sloppy winter when Jim Duval was unable to come to work and was reported to be laid up with a bad cold. Johnson, who was visiting the sick man every day, brought the news that the cold had developed into pneumonia. A couple of weeks later he hung up his coat with the laconic remark to the room in general:

"Well, fellers, Jim's dead."

There was a brief hush followed by a rustle of low conversation—a discussion of what ought to be done. One man started a collection for a floral piece, and another solicited funds for the widow. Two of them nearly came to blows over the question of who was to have charge of the funeral. Abner Johnson settled all differences by pointing out that Duval had been a Mason, and by taking charge of everything himself. In a few days Duval had been forgotten.

5

Ralph was sorry for Duval, and regarded his other fellow employés with amused contempt. To most of them the Folding Room represented a rise in life, while to him it was merely a necessary step toward something better, and as such he could not allow it to occupy much of his time. He presumed to the full on the fact that he was the appointee of a Republican congressman. He would come in late in the morning, work a few hours, take nearly two hours off for lunch, and leave about three in the afternoon. Every other day as a rule he went to Congressman Murkle's office and helped Jim with the mail. He asked innumerable questions about the business of being a secretary, and missed no opportunity for visiting other congressmen and the government departments. Everywhere he was polite and obliging. His start in political life was a humble one, but he knew how to make the most of it.

CHAPTER SIX

I

Near the end of the year Ralph was introduced by Congressman Rickert to the Hon. James Buchanan Randall of Texas, who was in search of a secretary.

Mr. Randall was a distinguished, picturesque, rather old-fashioned-looking gentleman. Tall, gaunt, white-haired, a trifle stooped, he wore the long, square-tailed frock coat which is still affected by some southern statesmen and he had the fine courtesy of southern tradition. He was full of dignity and yet quite without pretence. The expression of his eyes was at once kindly and worried, almost bewildered. He immediately began explaining his troubles to Ralph.

"I brought a young man here from Texas as my secretary," he said. "He was the son of one of my best friends and strongest supporters, and a most estimable young man in many ways. But he couldn't spell and he couldn't write a letter. I had to send him back much as I regretted the necessity. . . . Now what I need is some one who can answer letters without my assistance, so that I can devote my time to legislation. I suppose you have heard of the Randall Homestead bill? It is coming up before the Committee on Public Lands in a few weeks, and I must get ready to defend it."

Ralph easily convinced the old gentleman that he was the very man for the place, and forthwith he became a congres-

sional secretary, drawing fifteen hundred dollars a year from the United States Treasury. He considered himself most fortunate. This position would give him unusual opportunities for meeting congressmen, senators and other government officials, and for learning the methods of politics and government. He welcomed the chance to exercise his glibness in answering letters, and he did not think that he would have to work very hard. But of this latter notion he was quickly relieved.

2

Mr. Randall, until his recent elevation to Congress, had belonged for many years to the class of ornamental politicians. He was a native of Kentucky and had been bred in the traditions of the Henry Clay type of statesmanship —traditions of high public service, flowery eloquence, and chivalrous quixotic courage. He had spent most of his life in trying to realize these traditions in the rough-and-tumble politics of western Texas, whither he had emigrated after the Civil War. He had been a maker of Fourth-of-July and other occasional addresses, a Colonel on governors' staffs, a delegate to conventions, a man "prominently mentioned" in many conventions. By such honours the Democratic machine in his home state had sought to accord him a degree of recognition without giving him any actual power, for he was regarded by the practical gentlemen who stand behind the political scenes as a visionary with an unfortunate tendency toward radicalism. They valued him as a stump-speaker and wanted to keep him on their side, but they preferred not to place the weapon of office in his hands, fearing that he would use it indiscreetly. He had neglected his law practice, and had grown poor and grey in their service. Finally, at the age of sixty, he had won the nomination and

thereby the election as congressman-at-large, chiefly by his fiery speeches on the homestead-law question.

The one great object of his political career was therefore the passage of his homestead bill. It was designed to make the scant and arid remainder of the public lands in the West available to settlers by providing that it could be taken up in areas of a square mile, instead of the one hundred and sixty acres which were allowed under the old law. The measure was of little actual importance—a mere political sop for the land-hungry maw of an expropriated people. The lands involved were of relatively little value, and even if they were parcelled out as grazing homesteads, most of them would ultimately pass into the hands of the men of money by the process of debt and mortgage. But the measure nevertheless had great possibilities of popular appeal. It was opposed by the large cattle and sheep owners, who wanted instead a leasing bill which would enable them to gain control of those small fractions of the earth they had so far overlooked.

Here was an issue of the kind upon which the American politician thrives—an issue between predatory wealth and the common people, between the big fellow and the little fellow—an issue involving a great principle, which would lend itself to oratory, but have no important consequences no matter which way it was decided.

Congressman Randall believed in this issue as he believed in God, and all of his political fortunes were staked upon it. He had drafted the law long before coming to Washington, and had written an eloquent speech which he intended to deliver in support of it on the floor of the House. He had innocently imagined that he could easily bring his bill before Congress, and that its obvious merits and his own eloquence would insure its passage.

The Randall bill, along with a multitude of others, had disappeared into the files of the Committee on Public Lands. Its author discovered that his first task was to persuade the Chairman of that Committee to hold hearings upon it and report it to the House, and this he would by no means do unless it was altered to suit himself. After that a place would have to be granted it upon the calendar of the House, and this favour was largely in the keeping of the minority leader, the Speaker, and a few other congressmen who were jealous of a power they had won by twenty years of patient waiting. Should the House pass it, the more conservative Senate still stood in the way, and then it would have to pass through a joint conference committee. Congressman Randall began to fear that not only his term in Congress, but his very life might be too short for the realization of his dream. Nevertheless he went to work, digging up statistics to lay before the Committee, waiting upon the men of power, organizing the other western congressmen who favoured his measure,—making his fight with the weary, dogged hopefulness of an aging dreamer.

Meantime his constituents, while urging him by letter and petition to have that law passed without delay, wanted also about one thousand other things. They wanted jobs and pensions and claims attended to, they wanted bulletins and information on a hundred subjects from a score of different departments. They even sought to loot the salary which was barely sufficient for the Congressman's large family. A Methodist congregation in his home town informed him that he might send it a hundred dollars toward the building of a new church. He was called upon to contribute to the campaign funds of a candidate for the legislature who had supported him for Congress. The local chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals demanded

a contribution for its treasury, and enclosed him a leaflet on which was printed Senator Vest's famous tribute to a Dog.

3

Ralph's task was to attend to all this correspondence with as little demand as possible on the Congressman's time and attention, and it was an onerous job. Even with the assistance of Miss Bennett, the middle-aged stenographer who came in every morning to take dictation, it kept Ralph on the jump from nine until five.

He did his best, for several reasons. He wanted to make a reputation for efficiency, he was eager to learn, and although he rated his employer an old fool, he liked him. Indeed, almost any one must have liked this simple, well-intentioned old man, struggling with heroic futility in a combat he did not half understand. He took Ralph fully into his confidence, treated him as an equal and an ally, and thereby placed that astute young man under the only obligation he ever recognized—that of friendship. Ralph saw clearly enough that Randall's political career was a sinking ship, and he was resolved to desert it for a more promising craft when the opportunity offered. Meantime he served his employer as well as he could. But it was impossible to lift from the old man his burden of worry and disappointment. When the postmaster at Bordertown died, it became Mr. Randall's duty to recommend his successor. Two local factions each put forward a candidate for the place, one of them a woman, and Ralph began opening letters by the hundred from both sides. One faction insisted that this woman was immoral and that if she was appointed the Congressman's political standing in that County was forever impaired. An approximately equal number assured him that

he would lose a thousand votes at the next election if he denied the just claims of this virtuous widow who was struggling to support her seven children by needle work. Mr. Randall insisted upon reading all of this correspondence in an agony of bewilderment, and despite the fact that he seemed to face disaster no matter what he did, he was wholly unable to make a decision.

"What the hell shall I do, Ralph?" he demanded after a long delay.

"Appoint the woman," Ralph promptly advised.

"But how about these other fellows?" objected the Congressman. "They'll knife me sure."

"Let me draft a letter to send them—the more important ones," Ralph suggested. "I believe I can fix them."

The Congressman uttered a grim and dubious chuckle.

"Fire away," he said.

Ralph worked upon this letter with loving art. He delighted in the use of words. And both by instinct and by habit, language was to him not a vehicle for the expression of his own ideas and emotions, but an instrument for working his will upon others. He would no more reveal his own viewpoint and intention in the game of life than he would show his hand in a poker game. He was a born spell-binder, a medicine-man, a bamboozler of fools. His strength lay in a grasp, partly intuitive and partly deliberate, of the weaknesses and prejudices of common men. His career in salesmanship had been a school in this art of demagoguery, which is the art of all popular leaders, except insofar as they are superfools and victims of self-deception. They stand at the opposite pole from the truly creative man, who, with gigantic egotism, sets out to project the image of his inmost self upon the world.

So with his tongue in his cheek, Ralph proceeded to con-

coct a masterpiece of bombast. In the person of Congressman Randall he told the Democrats of Bordertown that he had determined to stake his political fortunes upon the promptings of a full and tender heart. Friends whom he could not afford to lose, friends whom it rent his very heart strings to offend, were opposed to the appointment of Mrs. Smithers. And yet he could do no other than appoint her. It was not a question of her desert, but of her need. She was poor, widowed, had seven children. As to her character, being a gentleman, he refused to hear anything about it. And even though she were less than perfect, let them remember the seven little ones, who were innocent and who cried for bread. Let them remember the high traditions of southern chivalry, which required that a gentleman should ever stand ready to sacrifice himself for womanhood and above all for motherhood. Let them remember their own mothers, let them hark back to the happy days of their own childhood, and so on to a smashing conclusion in which Mr. Randall, bathed in the white light of impending political martyrdom, hurled defiance into the faces of his enemies and pleaded for the support of all true Democrats and southern gentlemen.

The Congressman read this astounding piece of bathos with a wry smile, and sat looking at it for a full minute after he had finished. Then he tossed it back to Ralph.

"Let it go," he said wearily.

The letter brought apologies from several of Mrs. Smithers' most bitter opponents.

But there were many matters in which Ralph was powerless to help his employer. Mr. Randall's fellow citizens next beset him with petitions to have the street in front of the postoffice in his home town paved at government expense. He spent two weeks in an effort to have this item

included in the postoffice appropriation bill, but it was finally stricken out, and he read long editorials in the Republican press of the vicinity demanding to know what was the use of a congressman who could not even get a hundred feet of paving done.

Again, a delegation came all the way to Washington to urge upon him the importance of having the government dredge the channel of Goose Creek. Ralph was compelled to make a careful study of the mud flats and sand bars of that little-known waterway, and of the great natural resources in the way of building stone and post-timber which would be made accessible by its improvement. The congressman pleaded the case of Goose Creek before the Committee on Rivers and Harbours with all of his eloquence, but the Committee refused to make an appropriation for it. He was denounced for inefficiency by the Republican newspaper published in Riverton, the largest town on Goose Creek, while the opposition papers in the large cities accused him of being a pork-barrel congressman, insinuated that he had been interested in organizing a dredging company to do the proposed work, and averred that nothing less than an act of God could make Goose Creek navigable for anything but catfish.

The honest, well-meaning, sensitive Mr. Randall was hurt to the quick by all of these attacks, and he was bitterly disappointed in his congressional career. He had imagined it as a dignified and leisurely consideration of great public questions, and had felt that he brought to it some qualities that were valuable—honesty of purpose and a genuine capacity for serving interests other than his own. But he seemed wholly unable to make these qualities felt. It was by the clever trading of support, by bluff and sycophancy that most could be achieved in Congress. His chief oppo-

nent in the matter of the homestead law had won an important advantage over him by teaching the Chairman of the Committee on Rules how to play golf, and by obtaining for him a membership in a fashionable country club. A member of the Public Lands Committee would favour his bill if he would pledge himself to vote for a high tariff on wool, which he considered iniquitous. It was only by laying aside his ideals and his dignity as the antiquated things they were that he could even become a contender in this game.

There was one part of his work as a Congressman that Mr. Randall really enjoyed, and that was the preparation of the great speech he was to make on the floor of the House when his homestead bill came before that body.

"Well, Ralph," he would say, when he had a little leisure, "I think we'll work on the speech this afternoon. I have one or two new ideas I want to work in. You listen and tell me what you think of it. Miss Bennett will take down the new parts."

Ralph and Miss Bennett would dispose themselves to listen. The Congressman would begin reading from his notes in a slow matter-of-fact way, but as he proceeded he would introduce more and more of the pauses and inflections of oratory. Almost always he would end by rising and delivering his speech with impassioned emphasis.

It was admirably composed, in phrases that pleased the ear if they made no very profound appeal to the mind, and it was full of the old-fashioned learning that he had acquired in the library of a southern gentleman many years before—of references to Cicero and Cæsar and Gibbon and Carlyle. The Roman Empire was once more made to serve its ancient purpose of oratorical illustration, and the French Revolution was mentioned in connection with the well-worn threat

that history may repeat itself. In this issue between the squatters and the cattle barons of Texas was discovered a perfect example of the spirit of Democracy struggling against its oppressors. Ambling up and down his office in his old-fashioned, square-tailed coat, mouthing the catch-words of a mouldy ideal, he was a pathetically anachronistic figure—a relic of the days when the creed he preached had a reality in the minds and lives of men which it long since had lost.

Whatever other purpose it may have served, this exercise gave him a tonic pleasure. His face would flush and his eyes shine. He would lift his head and throw back his shoulders and appear years younger. All the rest of the day he would be in a mood of hopeful courage.

"By George, Ralph!" he would exclaim. "We'll beat those fellows yet. Once we get our bill on the floor of the House they can't oppose it—they won't dare!"

"It's a great speech, Mr. Randall," Ralph would assure him.

"I think it's wonderful!" Miss Bennett would murmur.

4

Several times Mr. Randall took his secretary home to dinner with him, so that Ralph came to know the Congressman's family quite well. It consisted of his wife and three daughters, aged respectively about thirty, twenty-five and sixteen years. These girls did not interest Ralph in the least. They were all homely, sensible, good-natured, conventional, and with little aptitude for coquetry. Mrs. Randall, a stout pleasant woman of fifty years, did her own cooking and employed no servant except a negro maid to wash the dishes. Her cookery was the one thing that at-

tracted Ralph to the Randall home, for she set a most excellent table in the southern style, with such delicacies as fried chicken, steamed rice and candied sweet potatoes.

These good women had been just as much disappointed in Washington as the Congressman himself. They had believed Mr. Randall's official position there would endow them with a certain amount of social prestige and opportunity, and they had been forced to learn the bitter fact that a congressman as such enjoys no real advantage in Washington society. Only a cabinet officer or a supreme court judgeship gains for the politician a place in the world of pompous function and court-like etiquette which centres about the president and the diplomatic corps. A congressman's family can achieve social recognition in Washington only by the possession of those attributes which insure it to any one in America—wealth and smartness.

Nowhere in America is competition for the company of presentable young men keener than in the Capital, for government officials seem always to bring wives and daughters with them but relatively seldom sons. To capture a regular escort who owns a dress suit and understands the manipulation of a tea cup, a girl in Washington must have physical charm and financial backing, and she must use both in a rather lavish fashion. It is quite usual for the families of *débutantes* to bear most of the expense of entertainment, including the theatre, and not unknown for young women accompanied by escorts to pay cab fares and café reckonings. In those days before the war especially, there throve in Washington a type of young man who considered that he had done his duty by society if he mantained a dress suit and an apartment, relying upon his hostesses not only for entertainment but also for most of his meals.

Mrs. Randall and her daughters had none of the qualifi-

cations for social success in such a milieu. Before coming to Washington they had laid out all of their pin-money on dresses, with many fearful deliberations as to what would be suitable for capital society, and they had found little opportunity to use even the modest wardrobes they could afford. At home they had been accounted socially prominent. Here they were as completely lost as they would have been in Paris. The girls bore their disappointment in good spirit and in silence, but the Congressman was painfully aware of it. He was deeply attached to his daughters and wanted them to be ladies of leisure and fashion, as the daughters of a southern gentleman should be. Not only was he too poor to realize this ambition for them in Washington, but when he failed of re-election they would probably have to earn their own livings, for he had lost all of his law practice and his small estate was burdened with debt. This humiliating fact he refused to admit either to himself or to the girls.

Ralph was naïvely informed of all this, little by little. Alda, the second daughter, was going to George Washington University, and he asked her what she was studying.

"I'm taking a business course," she explained. "I'm going to get a job when we get home. But don't tell father. He thinks I'm taking mediaeval history and French."

The eldest girl, who played the piano, intended to teach music, and the youngest somewhat vaguely planned a career in art, and spent most of her days drawing from casts in the Corcoran Gallery.

Once in a while the Congressman would receive an invitation to some official affair of the kind that are given by way of discharging the social obligations of the administration toward congressmen. A special art exhibit was held in the Pan-American Building. There were several large

receptions at the White House to which all congressmen, their families and guests were invited.

Mr. Randall obtained for Ralph an invitation to one of these latter affairs. Feeling that he could not afford to miss any opportunity of social preferment, he rented a dress suit and went with the family. The Randalls made the most of the occasion. The girls were busy with their frocks for days before the event, and the house was a turmoil of preparations when Ralph arrived. As a familiar friend of the family he was called upon to assist in these.

"Ralph, come and help me hook Mother up," Alda demanded. "She's gained seven pounds since this dress was made."

"I can't get these white gloves on, Mother," Mr. Randall complained.

"O well, carry 'em, Jim," his wife advised. "Just so they know you've got some."

A taxicab had been chartered for the evening, and this finally deposited them at the door of the White House and near the end of a line of several thousand men and women, which crawled at a glacier-like pace through one ornate chamber after another to the distant place where stood the President—a huge, weary, perspiring, fat man, grasping hand after hand for hours, muttering over and over again his formula of greeting.

It was two hours and twenty minutes by Ralph's watch from the time they first left the cab until they had touched the executive palm. Mrs. Randall, whose ankles were weak, had to give it up and go home before she had reached the President, but the rest of them stuck it out. There were supposed to be refreshments and dancing, but the former were all gone long before the Randall party came to the end

of the line, and the latter was impossible because the guests formed a solid mass, like cattle in a chute.

Mrs. Randall had evidently foreseen this disappointment, for she was waiting at home with chicken salad and sponge cake and lemonade. These viands revived the somewhat jaded spirits of the party, and they enjoyed telling each other what they had said to the President and what the President had replied, and about the fat woman who fainted just before she got to the receiving line, and the negro who tried to pass himself off as an Indian and was ejected. Afterward they played the piano and sang songs and Ralph danced with the girls, so that every one had a good time in spite of society.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

The whole country was stirred that winter by one of those periodical manifestations of moral idealism which form such a picturesque and stimulating element in American life. The Chicago Vice Commission had just made its famous report and popular writers were using it as material with telling effect. The "white slaver" suddenly became a figure in the popular imagination, as sinister as the Devil and as well known as the President. He was the newspaper villain of the hour. The women's clubs were all discussing him. Representative Mann passed his famous White Slave act. Forthwith, to show how it worked, the son of a prominent government official was intercepted on an amorous lark and sent to the penitentiary, while the whole country watched through the merciless lenses of the press. The righteous applauded and the immoral quaked. With the horrified eagerness of an adolescent gaining sophistication, America discovered the ancient and immutable fact that women sell their bodies to men.

Washington was found to be especially vile, and steps were taken to make it a national model of purity. An old bill for the abolition of Hooker's Division was brought forth and passed, and several hundred bewildered women were thrown upon the streets. A little later the District Commissioners appointed a new chief of police, who was known to be a

young man of high moral enthusiasm, and he devoted himself with zeal to the pursuit of these unfortunates.

2

Ralph was in a position to observe and to feel the effects of this eruption of public virtue. He had gained no foothold as yet in Washington society. He still turned for diversion to that underworld which had been his natural playground as a vagabond drummer. He was a haunter of bars and pool rooms, and a regular visitor to Mrs. Barker's place, where Helen Hobart was still his friend.

Mrs. Barker, who had long regarded her establishment as a safely vested interest, was thrown into a state of acute moral indignation by the legislative assault upon it.

"It ain't as though I was poor," she explained to Ralph. "I've laid by enough to keep me and then some, but I'd like to know what I've ever done to deserve such treatment. Haven't I always kept a decent place and paid my graft on time? And ain't a decent house better'n a lot of streetwalkers running around? Why, several of the very Congressmen that voted for that bill has been regular customers here, and they ain't had no cause to complain, either. I wouldn't treat no friend of mine that dirty!"

Most of the girls in her house left town with Mrs. Barker's assistance. Florence Pindell, who was too much attached to the soil to contemplate a distant removal, went back to the country and invested her money in land. Gladys Weston married her Navy cook and opened the long projected bakery shop in one of the buildings made available at a low rent by the abolition of the district, thus thriftily turning the general misfortune to her own advantage.

Helen Hobart also refused to leave town and for a time she was practically a pensioner on Ralph. He met this

situation loyally, partly because his one high principle in life was to be generous to those who stood in the relation of personal friends to him, and partly because he was really attached to the girl.

But it soon became apparent that Helen was more than able to take care of herself. Released from the trammel of Mrs. Barker's strict supervision, her personality underwent a rapid development. She showed herself unexpectedly cunning and resourceful. After a few months she formed an alliance with a group of choice spirits who catered to the demand in the first-class hotels for sociable ladies delivered on short notice. The bell boys were its agents and it kept a string of six large touring cars in service to make deliveries. Helen was the star of this troup. Being so pretty and well dressed she was always sent to the wealthiest patrons. Her new allies played the races by wire on inside information, and she increased her earnings by means of the good tips they gave her. For a while she even owned a car, but this was soon seized for debt as the result of a spell of hard luck.

She was so good-looking that Ralph often took her to the second-rate cafés. In a low-cut gown of some dark material that set off her china-white skin to the best advantage, with a wide picture hat upon her thick brown hair and the largest chrysanthemum or rose she could buy pinned at her breast, she was a striking figure. And she keenly enjoyed this display of herself, sweeping down the aisles with the proud disdainful bearing of young and self-conscious wickedness defying the world. It was as though she had caught some faint reflection, from the past, of the dignity and romance that once belonged to her ancient but decayed profession—some faint touch of the pride and power of the mediaeval adventuresses who dominated prelates and princes, of the

sparkling courtesans of antiquity who inspired poets, and despised wives.

When the cafés had closed they would go out upon the almost empty streets—joyful, a little tipsy, singing snatches of rag-time—and search for a place for further merriment. At first the cheap hotels along upper Pennsylvania Avenue accepted them without question. But as the police became more and more strict, it became harder to find a place.

"Have you any baggage?" was the inevitable question, and in default of baggage no room was to be had. When they did get one Helen would first peer under the bed and into the closet and out upon the fire escape, with an air of elaborate precaution. She was genuinely afraid of arrest, but it was evident that she did these things with a certain childish joy in making her life seem as romantic and dangerous as possible.

Finally one of these houses was raided, and after that none of them would admit couples unless the man carried a suitcase and the woman an air of respectability, while some of them catered to men only. For a short time there was consternation in the Washington underworld, and then the word went round that private dining rooms were the thing. Washington had certain small cafés whose upper floors were devoted to these exclusive rooms, and soon the number of them multiplied. This continued for a few months and then the order went out from the police headquarters that the doors must be taken away from all of the private dining rooms in town.

Illicit love was once more homeless. But presently there occurred a great boom in the taxicab business. Country roads near the capital at night were lined with cars, their curtains discreetly drawn. The Christian chief of police sent out a special flying squad of motorcycle men to patrol

the roads within the District of Columbia, and called upon the police of Maryland and Virginia to co-operate with him in his herculean battle against vice. A corps of women detectives was organized as an adjunct to the police department, and fair stool-pigeons were sent upon the streets to discover those bent upon evil.

But in spite of all this resolute warfare upon it, human iniquity persisted, to the amazement and despair of the young chief of police. And his discomfiture was increased by the fact that thieves took advantage of his devotion to the cause of purity to ply their business unmolested while the policemen were hunting vice. Citizens protested through the newspapers, seeming grossly to care more for their goods and money than for the moral cause. But the young idealists persevered in the face of all threat and criticism with the awful courage that springs from a simple faith.

3

Ralph was soon weary of playing this furtive game with the policemen. He saw clearly enough that in this as in other matters it was only the relatively poor who were much molested by the law. Those who had money enough to rent apartments did as they pleased. He heard with envy the gossip which is always current among newspaper reporters, clerks, and secretaries. A Cabinet officer had brought a retinue of six charmers to Washington with him. A prominent magazine writer, who had made a reputation by his eloquent defence of the domestic virtues, boasted that he had been forced to give up answering the telephone as a measure of self-preservation. The head of a great bureau was said to entertain all of his prettiest stenographers in his flat. That he should beg for admission to a

cheap lodging house while these prosperous and influential gentlemen enjoyed life in peace seemed to Ralph a painful injustice. He could not afford an apartment, but he resolved that he would have one anyway.

After a careful search he found just what he wanted. It was a place of two rooms and a bath on the top floor of an old remodelled residence on Sixteenth Street. The ground floor was occupied by a real-estate office, and the two upper ones had been recently refinished in the form of four small apartments. It was in a good neighbourhood and yet a quiet one, where a discreet man might do as he pleased without attracting undesired attention.

The furniture he bought on the instalment plan, and with great care. He had acquired by observation a very definite ideal of bachelor smartness which he sought to realize. An imitation oriental rug covered most of the floor. There were two Morris chairs, a heavy square table and a leather settee with many pillows. A couple of English hunting prints showing men in bright red coats galloping after black and white dogs gave the correct artistic touch, he thought, for he had often seen such pictures in fashionable clubs. A rack for his pipes also hung upon the wall, and a single college fraternity pennant was displayed to make it clear that he was a university man of the better sort. In a small cellarette he installed a decanter of whiskey, some glasses and a box of good cigars, which he would not smoke himself, but would have on hand for a possible visitor whom he might want to impress. In order to make his person harmonize with this new elegance he purchased a velvet smoking jacket and a pair of red leather slippers of the Russian boot design just then coming into style.

When all this had been done he was greatly pleased with himself and his new environment. Reclining comfortably

in his Morris chair, smoking a pipe, he let his imagination dwell upon the social advantages such a place would give him. He pictured himself receiving some man of influence there, offering him a drink and fifty-cent cigars, tactfully letting it be known that he was a congressional secretary only because of an interest in politics and that his income was chiefly derived from Wall Street. He dreamed also of beautiful women coming to his door discreetly veiled. He had provided himself with the setting and appearance of smart prosperity and he felt sure that the reality of it would follow.

Meantime he was paying about a third of his salary in rent and instalments on his furniture, and he took earnest thought as to how he could make his establishment self-supporting. About the House Office Building was a group of gay young men, including several sons of congressmen with a good deal of money, who played an occasional game of poker or bridge in some empty office. Ralph selected among these the ones who had most wealth and least skill in games of chance, and invited them to a poker party at his flat. This gathering soon became a regular Saturday night event with drinks and other refreshments. His first guests brought other guests and the game grew in size and fame. Good poker players were never invited twice, but youths who lusted for excitement and had wealthy papas were always welcome. One of the brightest stars of the game was a youth of Spanish blood named Bustamente. He was the son of a wealthy Brazilian planter, and was one of the group of South American law students at Georgetown University—a lean handsome fellow with fiery black eyes and a hot head, who gambled like a fiend. Stud-poker was his favourite game. He nearly always won at first and nearly always lost in the long run because his victory

inspired him with the conviction that he was the beloved child of fortune and could not lose. Ralph very profitably demonstrated to him again and again that such was not the case.

This game was soon more than paying the rent of the flat, and Ralph determined to celebrate his prosperity by holding a "ladies' night." He invited five men whose favour he especially valued, and charged Helen to find four other girls who were good-looking and knew how to dress. That night was a Roman one. There were several cases of beer in addition to whiskey and a buffet supper prepared by a caterer. A rented phonograph supplied music. They rolled back the rug, pushed the furniture into corners, and danced the bunny-hug with perspiring abandon. Bustamente developed a spirit of mad gaiety. He danced an exhibition tango with Helen, swinging her around like a rag doll. Her hairpins fell on the floor in a tinkling shower, her heavy brown hair blew wild, and her china-white skin was flushed with excitement. She was for the moment beautiful—a veritable sprite of wanton joy. At the end of his dance Bustamente lifted her upon a table and addressed her earnestly.

"From now on," he told her, "you belong to me. I am rich. I will take you to Rio. You will have a house of your own and lots of money and a pearl necklace. . . ."

At this point Ralph punched out the lights. In the ensuing confusion he filched Helen away from the fuddled Brazilian and shoved another girl into his arms.

4

Doc and Henry, who still occupied the old room in the Y. M. C. A., came to call on Ralph in his flat.

"Pretty nifty," Doc pronounced it, with a perceptible

touch of envy in his voice. "I'll have a place something like this when I get my practice started. Meantime the old Y is good enough for me."

"This would be a great place to write," Henry remarked. "How do you do it, Ralph? Did you crack a safe or lose a wealthy uncle?"

"I just went ahead and got it, Henry," Ralph explained. "That's the only way to get anything you want. Get the goods first and then look around for the money afterwards. Now I've got a little Saturday night game going up here that more than pays the rent. Every time I send out one of my dollars I expect it to come back leading another dollar by the hand, and it generally does. The trouble with you, Henry, is that you're too damn modest. If I had your brains and my own nerve I could make a million."

5

Helen Hobart came whenever he summoned her—a woman perfectly promiscuous and yet perfectly faithful. Many men might kiss her but Ralph was her only love—the sole recipient of that tenderness which is in every woman and which must find an outlet. Ralph had no idea what a brilliant and beloved being he was in her eyes. Her flight from the country and from her husband had been in some sense a desperate quest for a life more beautiful and adequate—a brave attempt to realize her dreams. Compared to the dirt and toil and brutality of the life she had known in the country, that which she now led was a splendid adventure in a setting of luxury. And Ralph was the hero of that adventure. To her he was a being incomparably clean and honest and elegant. He filled her small mind and satisfied her senses. She longed to possess him wholly and

exclusively, and knew that she never could. She longed for him to give her a devotion like her own, and knew that he never would.

"Say that you love me, Ralph!" she would beg.

"Aw, hell, of course I do, Helen," he would reply condescendingly.

6

One day he received at the office a mysterious telephone call. He was asked by some one who gave no name to come to a lodging house on Pennsylvania Avenue. When he asked for further details he was told merely that a woman who was in trouble there had asked that he be sent for.

A policeman admitted him to the room.

"I don't know nothing about it," the officer said in reply to his question. "Just one more of them cases where a guy shoots the woman and then shoots himself. We have about one a month."

Inside the cheap bedroom Ralph beheld a curious scene, which at first he did not understand. Seated in a rickety rocking chair with his legs spread out before him and his arms hanging limply at his sides, was a tall, lean, sunburned fellow. He wore a new cheap suit of blue serge that was too small for him and a pair of large new tan shoes. He had the appearance of a countryman who had just come to town for a holiday. He sat like a very tired man resting, and his gaze seemed to be fixed on the pit of his stomach. Ralph presently noticed that there was a great dark spot on his vest, and that it slowly widened.

An interne from the Emergency Hospital and a woman employed about the place were bending over a figure on the bed, which was almost concealed by them, and from which came at regular intervals a long gasping groan.

Presently the man in the chair turned his head slowly toward the bed.

"Will you forgive me, Helen?" he asked in a weary tone.

The woman ceased groaning long enough to answer in the snappish matter-of-fact voice of an irritated woman.

"No, I won't!"

Then she groaned again.

"O-o-o-o--h! I don't want to die," she protested.

Ralph scarcely knew her at first when he bent over Helen. Her face was white as chalk and her eyes were wide and large and had an expression of frightened surprise. Her mouth, utterly relaxed, was the mouth of a child.

"Kiss me, Ralph," she requested weakly. "I know I'm a goner. That big hick, my husband, he shot me. . . . Said he wanted to talk it over. . . . Tried to make me go back. . . . Nothing doing. . . ."

She sighed and closed her eyes when his lips touched hers, then suddenly flung herself away in a brief death struggle.

Jack Hobart was presently carried out on a stretcher, although the interne assured Ralph that he would not live more than a few hours.

Ralph walked rapidly down the street, shaking his head from time to time. A pained bewilderment possessed him. That Helen was dead, that any one could be wiped out that way in an instant—it was hard to realize. Death had never been a reality to him because he was so vividly alive himself and so wholly absorbed in the moment.

"It's hell!" he remarked as he hurried along, not knowing exactly where he was going. He repeated this several times, and then he added, as an emphatic afterthought:

"God, I'm glad I wasn't with her, anyhow!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

Near the Y. M. C. A. was a small saloon and restaurant combined, which served at a few small tables excellent crabs, shrimps, lobsters and other sea food. Ralph often dropped in there about eleven o'clock at night for a stuffed crab and a bottle of beer, which made an excellent nightcap for a man of his indomitable digestion.

One evening he found the place in a turmoil. The barkeeper, assisted by a couple of negro waiters, was trying to eject a man who was drunk and much incensed at a refusal to serve him any more drinks. The patrons had all gathered around this row so that Ralph could not clearly see its central figure, but there was something familiar to him about the voice which rose from the centre of disturbance in a profane Phillipic.

"You damn' low brows," it shouted, "Don't you lay a hand on me! What if I am drunk? I've got more sense drunk than one hundred thousand of you boneheads have when you're sober. This is supposed to be a free country and I'll get just as drunk as I damn well please. . . . "

It was Henry Lambert with his face flushed, his long blond pompadour fallen across his broad intellectual brow, his bloodshot eyes peering through a fringe of hair in embattled fury, his fists clenched and his mouth writhing in scorn and anger. The negroes were afraid to touch him,

and the bar-keeper was trying feebly to move him toward the door by gentle pushes and persuasion.

"Now young fellar," he urged, "I know you don't want to get me into no trouble. I'm liable to lose my license any day as it is, and I can't afford to have a drunk in here. . . . "

"Hello, Henry," Ralph interposed in a casual way. "I was just looking for you. C'mon up to the flat."

He took his friend by the arm and began to lead him toward the door. Henry hung back a little.

"I'm gonna buy a drink. . . . " he began to protest.

"Never mind," Ralph told him. "I got a whole case of it up at the flat."

"What the hell's the matter with you, Henry?" he demanded when he had his man on the street. "I never saw you so stewed before. . . . "

"Well, I'm not half as stewed as I'm gonna be," Henry assured him loudly. "I'm gonna keep on loadin' it in till I can't think and can't remember and then I'll be all right."

"You better remember one thing, Henry. You've got to sober up some time," Ralph reminded him, "and then you'll feel like hell. . . . "

"By Golly, that's so!" Henry agreed, suddenly stopping. The fresh air was beginning to sober him. "That's the hell of it! A fellow's got to sober up. If he could stay stewed all the time life wouldn't be so bad."

He leaned against the iron fence around the State, War and Navy building, threw away his hat, pushed his hair back and proceeded to deliver himself of bitter thoughts.

"The trouble is, Ralph," he explained, "that the human animal isn't normally endowed with sufficient spiritual exaltation to maintain the illusion that life is worth a damn. He's lost his natural animal innocence without gaining any-

thing to take its place—that is, the man of brains has. Now you take yourself, Ralph, you have a good time because you haven't got any brains—that is, any intellect. You can make money and all that, but you can't think, and you ought to be damn glad of it. You live just like a bird. You catch your worm and your mate and that's all you want and all your consciousness will hold. But look at me. . . . "

"C'mon Henry," Ralph interposed, "I'm looking at you and you look like a damn fool. . . . "

"No, wait a minute, Ralph," Henry protested, clinging desperately to the fence. "The trouble with me is that my capacious and unresting intellect contains the whole past and the whole future—in fact, the whole damn universe for that matter. When I look ahead I see myself slowly decaying, losing my pep and my teeth and my intelligence and then dying. When I look back I see my own amazing record of intellectual imbecility. And I see it all so damn clear. . . . When I'm drunk it's different—sometimes. Not tonight. But I've seen times when I was so drunk I liked Washington and believed in my immortal soul. A man ought to be that way all the time—naturally, not artificially. That's what all the great mystics were. Walt Whitman, for instance. There isn't a sober line in his book. He got drunk on his mother's milk and stayed drunk all his life. . . . "

"Well, you can't do that, Henry," Ralph reminded him, pulling him away from the fence. "C'mon over to this lunch room and get something to eat and some coffee, and then you can tell me what's the trouble. . . . "

When he had been fed and had drunk two cups of coffee, Henry became sober—painfully sober. He went along with Ralph, silent and morose, with the furrow deep between his heavy sombre eyes.

When they were seated in the flat Ralph went at him again.

"You claim to be a great boozer, Henry," he told him. "But I know you hardly ever get really drunk like this. You must have something on your mind. Tell me what it is, and maybe I can help you."

He was curious to know what had brought Henry to this desperate pass, and he was also really eager to help him. A strong friendship existed between the two men. They were widely different in most ways, and yet there was a certain community of spirit between them. They were both, in their separate ways, sceptics and rebels against the social order. Ralph felt, and expressed in his way of living, somewhat the same contempt for its forms and pretences that Henry put into words.

"I've got enough on my mind, all right, Ralph," Henry answered gloomily. "But it won't do any good to talk about it, I guess."

"Come on, tell me about it," Ralph urged. "I suppose you've had another fuss with your girl, or else she forgot to write to you or something."

"Worse than that, Ralph," Henry admitted. "I got an invitation to her wedding."

"Well, if she's going to be married, it's all off. You can't stay drunk the rest of your life just because she gave you the go-by. There's lots of other girls. . . . "

"Don't start that line, Ralph," Henry protested irritably. "This is the only girl I want, or ever expect to want. I admit that it isn't logical, but my feeling is that if I could marry her I would somehow be all right and that if I can't life isn't worth a damn to me. . . . You see we had a fuss a few weeks ago and quit writing. She went and got en-

gaged to this other fellow just to spite me, I guess. He's the family choice. And the first thing you know they got out the invitations on her, and then she began to lose her nerve. I had a letter from her today, saying she would always love me, and that she was miserable, but didn't know what to do. . . . " Henry's voice was near breaking.

"Well, you poor simp, what more do you want?" Ralph demanded. "That is if you really want the girl. Why don't you dash down there and run away with her? I don't see how they can stop you. . . . "

"Yes, why don't I?" Henry echoed. "Because I have just a little less than eleven dollars to my name, and my salary is just twenty-five bucks a week, and I couldn't raise a hundred for my life. . . . "

"Hell, Henry, you're too much scared of money. As far as the money goes, I can lend you a hundred and fifty. You can negotiate a honeymoon on that, and afterward you can find a better job. It isn't hard to make money if you put your mind on it."

Henry Lambert jumped to his feet and walked up and down the floor.

"By God, Ralph, I've got a notion to take you up!" he announced. "I don't know where I'll come out, but I'll make it somehow. And I'll have the girl!"

"Now, go easy Henry," Ralph cautioned. "You'll have the girl, all right, and you'll have her for a long time. Don't forget that. I never could see marriage, myself, unless the girl had at least half a million. . . . Have her folks got any money?"

"Yes, her grandmother's a rich old lady, I believe. But you don't think I'd take anything from her, do you?"

"Well, I don't see why not," argued the practical Ralph.

"Anyway, I guess the best thing you can do is to go and get the girl. . . . Only don't ever come and tell me that I pushed you into it. . . ."

"By God, Ralph, you're a real friend! Damned if I don't try it! I'll wire her tonight, and if she's game I'll go over there tomorrow. . . ."

"Wire nothing!" Ralph snorted. You can't catch any women by wire. You get on the car and go over there and call her up and tell her you want to see her. Then don't let go of her until you're married."

After Henry had been further sobered by dipping his head in cold water, they went out to get a check cashed, talking excitedly about the proposed elopement.

"By Golly, Ralph, I can hardly realize that I'm going to have her," Henry said. "You don't understand what it means to me, and I could never make you understand and I won't try, but I want you to know that I appreciate this little shove. It was just what I needed. You see, I always wanted her so much that I could never believe I was going to have her. That's one reason I slumped so when I heard about the engagement. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I went and dug up an old six-shooter of mine and loaded it and was going to take a shot at my remarkable though impractical cerebellum. Then I got to thinking about life and death and all that and I felt so rotten that I went out and got drunk instead. . . . Y'see, Ralph, the trouble is that any catastrophe acts on me as a stimulus to reflection rather than action. I apprehend its ultimate significance, but I never know what the hell to do about it. . . ."

"Yes, yes, Henry," Ralph replied impatiently. "I get you. Now let me tell you what to do. You go over there and register at the Belvidere and get your transportation to Atlantic City—if the thing falls through you can always get

your money back. First thing in the morning you phone her and ask her to come down and meet you. Don't tell her anything else. And when she gets there don't let her out of your sight until you're married, and don't let her wire the folks until the next morning. . . . "

Henry finally boarded the electric car at one o'clock in the morning, effervescing polysyllabic eloquence to the last moment, a rapt and mystical light in his eyes.

When he had gone, Ralph laughed. He wondered whether Henry would carry the thing through without bungling, and was inclined to be doubtful.

"Anyway, that hundred and fifty is just as safe as it would be in the bank," he reflected. "Henry's honest as hell."

2

Two days afterward he received the following night letter:

We are up here on the Jersey coast. Have discovered the most beautiful spot on earth. Alice sends regards and thanks. Back next Monday. Please tell office I am sick.

Henry.

CHAPTER NINE

I

Inauguration. For once, a day of sunshine and modest breezes. And Washington, for a day, is a swarming city. Its population has doubled overnight. Every hotel and boarding house is filled to capacity with guests paying double prices.

Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House is lined on either side with masses of humanity, held in check by ropes and policemen. People hang from every window and festoon every roof. A vantage point is worth anywhere from five to twenty-five dollars.

The first spectacle to greet these myriad eyes is that of two gentlemen in silk hats and black coats riding from the White House to the Capitol. One of them is an enormous fat man with an expression of good nature and relief. The other is a thin hatchet-faced man. He smiles and bows, as he must, but between bows his expression is tense and eager.

The wide lawn between the Capitol and the Library of Congress is now a lawn of faces. Every foot of it is covered. People have swarmed up every tree as far as the branches will hold them. They suggest ants on a spot where syrup has been spilled.

At the top of the east steps of the Capitol a decorous little group forms—the billowy, black-robed bulk of the Supreme Court, senators, diplomats and Cabinet officers, all

black-coated, high-hatted and serious, like men at a funeral.

The thin eager man is at the front of this group. His face, as he takes the oath of office, is rapt and solemn. It is the face of a man who believes completely in himself and in his dreams.

What does he think as he looks upon these solid acres of men? He has talked and written much of a thing called The People. He has said what it thinks and what it wants and what it needs. He has promised to The People a New Freedom. Well, here it is to receive its gift. The People lies before him—a monster with a million heads, most of them no good. It wants a million different things. Yet it believes in this man. For it, too, has faith in dreams. Wherefore it has come and spread itself at his feet and greets him with a million-voiced shout.

Is he at a loss? Is he perturbed? If so he does not show it. A double row of cavalry stands between him and The People. He gives an order, waves an arm. The double row of cavalry falls back, and The People, like a huge jelly-fish, spreads twenty feet closer.

And then the address:

"I summon all honest men, all patriotic men, all forward-looking men to my side. God helping me, I will not fail them, if they will but counsel and sustain me!"

Honest men, patriotic men, forward-looking men—they are present in multitudes. Hear them yell!

And then the parade. Soldiers, cadets, brass bands, Indians, college boys, fraternal orders, "daughters" of this and "sons" of that, labour unions, political clubs, governors and their staffs, personages riding in carriages or on weary work horses requisitioned for the occasion. The People pounding the asphalt.

The new President is in the reviewing stand before the

White House now. First The People spread its breadth before him. Now it will drag its length. There are miles of it. He stands until long after dark—until the last blare of music has died and the last faithful Democratic foot has thudded by. The New Freedom has begun.

2

The change of administration filled Ralph with a profound regret that he could not qualify as a deserving Democrat. The city was swarming with honest, patriotic, forward-looking men who had responded to the President's call, and there were jobs for nearly all who could show that they had faithfully served the Democratic cause. Ralph, although he was working for a Democratic Congressman at the time, had let it be known from the first that he was Republican, and almost all his influential friends were Republicans. He could discover no means of approach to the political pie counter. But he did, soon after inauguration, succeed in attaching himself to a more able and promising man than Randall.

He had become acquainted in the course of his work with Representative Frank H. Rauschuld, who was a Republican from a large western city, and had immediately marked him down as a man worth cultivating. For one thing, Rauschuld was rich. He was reputed to be worth nearly a million. Besides, he had served two terms in Congress, and his survival of the Wilson Landslide was a convincing demonstration of his political strength. When Ralph heard that Rauschuld's secretary was leaving him to take up the practice of law, he hastened to apply for the place.

Representative Rauschuld was a stocky, rosy man with a firm jaw and small shrewd eyes. He was clean and well-groomed in the scrubbed, polished self-conscious way of a

man who has known the dirt of toil and has lifted himself out of it by a brave effort. His trousers had almost a cutting edge, his vest was bordered where it touched his shirt with a white silken cord, his broad muscular hands shone with the art of the professional manicure.

His office was as neat and orderly as his person. In a corner of it a pretty young woman was at work at a typewriter. Her black hair and green dress made a charming splash of colour in the sunlight. When Ralph stated his willingness to consider a position, she threw him a quick but interested glance.

"You say you have had newspaper experience?" the Congressman queried, scrutinizing him through the narrowed eyes of habitual caution.

"Yes, sir. I have done a great deal of publicity work for Mr. Randall. And I know the press gallery pretty well."

Rauschuld nodded.

"This office is run on business principles," he explained. "Do you know how to keep a card index? Are you up on modern business methods?"

"Yes, sir, I've been in business all my life. In fact, I came to Washington at considerable financial sacrifice because I want to do something—well, a little bigger. My father was a good Republican and did what he could for the party, and I. . . . "

"Never mind that," said Congressman Rauschuld. "You're not getting a political job now. This is a business proposition. All you need to hold this job is the ability to do the work. I'll give you the full fifteen hundred dollars that comes out of the Treasury for secretarial salary. Some Congressmen, you know, split it two or three ways, but I'll let you have it all."

Ralph looked grave and said nothing.

"Well, how about it?" queried the Congressman at length.

"I'm sorry," Ralph replied. "I'm sure I could do your work, and would like to do it, but twenty-five hundred is about the smallest amount I could consider. I have several other offers."

The Congressman uttered something between a snort and a chuckle.

"I can't say the money makes much difference to me if you can do the work," he said. "I'll start you on two thousand with the understanding that in three months you either go up to twenty-five hundred or get out."

The deal was closed.

3

Representative Rauschuld was of German descent but American-born and thoroughly American in every respect. His father had beeen a bricklayer, and he too had been apprenticed to that trade. But he had also been an amateur athlete of considerable repute in the athletic clubs, Y. M. C. A.'s and Turnvereins of his native city. He had performed on the horizontal bar, boxed and wrestled, and in this last sport he had won several amateur championships. His prominence as an athlete had brought him into contact with the young men of wealth who follow such sport, and he had discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that most of them were men much like himself. A great determination had been born in him. He had resolved to step from the class of labourers into that of men who own and command.

This dream of social advancement made him a man of restless ambition. He cultivated his talent for good-fellowship. He studied manners and reformed his grammar. He came to know the class he aspired to enter better than

it knew itself because he studied it deliberately and with a purpose.

He rose rapidly, for he was frugal, shrewd and resolute. He began as a small contractor in brick and concrete work, helped in the matter of obtaining contracts and raising money by his acquaintances of the athletic clubs. At first he used to work occasionally among his men, for he loved bricks and mortar and the sweat of physical effort with an inborn sensuous love, but later he gave this up because he found that it detracted from his dignity in the eyes of business men. More and more he stuck to his office and to his plans. Then he bought a tract of land on the edge of town and began putting up little houses. A new car line, which bisected his property, was the making of his fortune. His rise became a dizzy excitement. Money, which had come to him so gradually when he gave sweat for every dollar, now poured in upon him from every side. He came to love money, and even more the sense of himself waxing steadily greater in the eyes of men. He bought cars, built himself a house, he owned a farm. So he spread himself out on the face of the earth. And he savoured the romance of his rise like a child hearing a fairy tale.

Inevitably there had come a time of reaction. He had made his fortune and he had also found his limitations, for his power of organization was not large. He would have liked to go on up into the company of the great men of money, but he did not know how. He was, after all, only a shrewd building contractor who had made a lucky speculation in real estate.

During this period of partial stagnation he felt restless and discontented. He spent much time on his farm where he built all sorts of things in brick and concrete—silos, pigpens and barns—enjoying again the privilege of working

with his hands. When in town he lived a looser and gayer life than usual, seeking furtively for new loves that would not damage his social standing.

Then he had gotten into politics, and immediately his energies had been concentrated again. Here was a fresh field for his lust of power. The romance of himself went into a new phase. And it was not as difficult as the first one, for a great many men were now in his debt. He was an alderman, a national committeeman, and after three years, got the seat in Congress which he had sought from the first.

He came to it with no illusions. He knew that a Congressman is socially a cipher and politically a very small figure unless he has either money and adroitness or unusual ability. He knew that he lacked the latter advantage but that he had the other two, and he set about using them systematically for his own ends.

4

The masterpiece of Rauschuld's office, and Ralph's chief care, was a card index which contained the name, occupation and all other available data concerning each constituent with whom the Congressman had any dealings.

"Put in all the information you can get anywhere," the Congressman instructed his secretary. "The more we know about a man the better."

Ralph saw that his success was closely bound up with this index, and he spared no pains to improve it. By a study of directories, telephone books, club and association lists and newspapers, he was able to discover an amazing amount about the more important names in his list.

When a wealthy baker wrote to the Congressman asking for a pamphlet published by the Department of Agriculture, Rauschuld tossed the letter to Ralph.

"See that he gets it by return mail," he directed. "He'll probably write a letter of thanks. You will reply to that telling him that we are glad to serve him at any time, and put some personal note into the letter if possible."

In this instance Ralph was able to lay before his employer a letter in which the baker was congratulated on having recently won a tournament at duckpins. This sort of thing delighted the Congressman.

He directed Ralph always to send out speeches and pamphlets so they would reach constituents on Sundays, when they had time to read. No man was to be sent anything unless it was pretty sure to interest him.

Although the Congressman never thought of it in that way, his card index constituted a remarkable study of a typical American constituency. It showed that he represented in Congress men of scores of different kinds, including many kinds he knew nothing about. He represented men not only of diverse but of conflicting interests. In a word, he did not know what he represented, besides himself, and neither did any one else. But he did know what he wanted. He wanted to make his place in Congress secure, and to use it as a springboard for an upward leap into society and politics, and these ends he pursued with intelligence and energy.

While he was strengthening his hold upon his constituency by doing a multitude of small favours gracefully, he was making his way in Washington in much the same way. He had sought and obtained a place on the Committee on Naval Affairs because the Secretary of the Navy and the admirals of the Navy are persons of social weight and influence. He was a consistent "big navy" man. "America needs the biggest navy in the world," was a phrase he loved to roll upon his tongue, and he knew in detail all the standard arguments in favour of a large navy, such as the Japanese menace, the

Panama Canal, our long coast line on two oceans and the need of upholding the Monroe Doctrine.

Naturally, the high officers of the Navy appreciated this support of their interests. They came to know him as a man upon whom they could rely to uphold their demands for money in the Naval Affairs Committee. Rauschuld made a specialty of replying to the Democratic members, who were bent on retrenchment, and he did it in the pugnacious manner of a born fighter. What he lacked in eloquence he made up in statistics, for which he had an excellent memory. A man of mechanical aptitudes, he took a genuine interest in the devices of naval warfare, and impressed his colleagues by his knowledge of revolving turrets, fire control and submarines. Whenever an argument seemed to be going against him he would cunningly lead it off into a wilderness of technical detail where few of the other Congressmen could follow.

In these ways he was laying the foundation of a reputation as an authority on naval matters. Already he had given out several interviews which had attracted attention. And he became increasingly sincere about his naval policy. He had started with a complete ignorance of the subject and with no conviction except that the naval issue would serve his personal ends. But after two years devoted to reading everything he could find on one side of the question and nothing he could avoid on the other, he believed firmly that the biggest navy in the world was necessary to the salvation of America. If any one had accused him of working for a big navy in order to gain a personal advantage, he would have been sincerely indignant.

If he could hold his position in Congress, as he felt sure that he could, time and Republican success would probably bring him the chairmanship of his committee, and the naval

portfolio was a thing he might reasonably hope for. As a Cabinet member he would have access to the inner circles of official society. He would sit at a table with the President, and discuss the affairs of the nation and of the world. What a glorious destiny for a bricklayer's apprentice! What a romance of Democracy his life would be!

So Congressman Rauschuld was living again in that region he loved, of dreams romantic and exhilarating, yet shrewdly practical.

Meantime he did not neglect to capitalize the advantages of his present position in a social way, He and his wife spent little time upon the so-called congressional set, but they missed no opportunity to come in contact with persons of a higher social order. They went to all the great Charity Balls which were held at the Willard every season. At these functions the officially and socially great always sat in boxes, exposing themselves to the gaze of all those who would pay five dollars for the privilege, and the proceeds were devoted to the welfare of tubercular children, paupers, and other regrettable by-products of civilization. Congressman Rauschuld was there able to greet the Cabinet and Naval officers whom he had met in his official capacity, and so to make a very plausible show of being among the elect. Furthermore, when the naval appropriation bill was before the committee, and he was battling heroically for the biggest navy on all the seas, he invited some of these same worthies to dinner, and they could scarcely afford either to refuse his invitations or to neglect the duty of returning them. So his name was seen in the society columns of the Washington and Chicago papers in the same paragraph with names of national note.

The young women who gathered social news found him a most affable and accommodating gentleman. In fact, he was kind to every one connected with the press. He kept

in a drawer of his desk a special box of good cigars for newspaper correspondents, thus baiting them to his office as one might bait shy birds whose song is sweet. By this simple device he obtained daily visits from many reporters who would not otherwise have noticed him at all. They would come in regularly whether the Congressman was there or not, take any bit of news which Ralph might have ready for them, open the drawer and help themselves to a few cigars. They could always use the cigars if not the information. But they were good-natured fellows, and usually gave the hospitable Congressman space whenever they could.

He was extremely prolific of bills and resolutions. These were nearly always of a timely nature, and were accompanied by carefully prepared interviews with the Congressman to explain them to the public. Ralph's most important duty, next to fattening the card index, was the preparation of these measures and interviews. Every subject that achieved prominence in the papers was carefully studied by the Congressman and his secretary with a view to its legislative possibilities.

A great deal of newspaper space was given that spring to a national shortage of livestock. The price of meat was rising. Packers and butchers were slaughtering indiscriminately to take advantage of it. The farmer, as usual, was not getting his share of the money and so was not raising enough stock to keep up with the demand.

"I want you to go down to the Department of Agriculture, Ralph," the Congressman directed. "And find out what kind of a law would remedy this situation. Not any radical bunk of course. Something we can use."

Ralph spent a laborious afternoon at the Bureau of Animal Husbandry, listening to much talk he did not understand about land values, marketing pools, and the like. But one

obliging young fellow suggested a plan which seemed free of all objections, and thoroughly comprehensible. He advised a measure making it unlawful to kill any meat animal, except poultry, before it had attained the age of two years, and he made a rapid calculation showing that millions of pounds of meat would be saved by allowing lambs and calves and suckling pigs to attain their adult weight before they were slaughtered.

The Congressman was delighted with this. The bill was introduced and widely noticed in the press. Most of the papers ridiculed it, and all of the butchers assailed it. Mr. Rauschuld had none of the big packers in his district, so he was not at all feased. He produced his authority and his figures in reply, thus getting a second allowance of publicity, and fairly overwhelming his enemies, while the measure went to slumber with many of its fellows in the files of the document room.

He saw another opportunity for fame when a sudden epidemic of bichloride of mercury poisoning swept the country. Suddenly and inexplicably men and women had begun swallowing this poison by mistake, and the papers were full of the details of their agonizing deaths.

A physician of the Public Health Service explained the thing to Ralph and gave him just the idea that he needed.

"Bichloride has very recently come into use as a family antiseptic," the doctor explained. "The stuff is put up in little bottles almost exactly like those that contain digestive tablets, and the two kinds of tablets also look alike. Somebody gets stomachache and swallows four grains of bichloride thinking it is pepsin. It's too bad that the poison can't be put up in some distinctive kind of a bottle. . . ."

The result of this interview was another Rauschuld bill, providing that bichloride of mercury should be packed only

in bottles with little bosses all over the outside, so that even in the dark they would be distinguishable from all other bottles. This excellent measure met with some ridicule in the press and complete neglect in Congress, but it caused the name of Rauschuld to be once more broadcasted. The Congressman understood perfectly that political reputation is made by filling space, and that he who shrinks from ridicule remains unknown.

Nor was he merely seeking to get publicity by all this restless activity. He wanted the publicity, to be sure, but here again self-interest harmonized with sincere conviction. He believed, as nearly all congressmen seem to believe, that every wrong may be righted, and every obstacle in the path of man's destiny removed, by the passage of a law. He wrote bills and resolutions as an old-fashioned country doctor writes prescriptions, feeling that to maintain his reputation he must do something about every symptom he discovers, and that if the patient is but given medicine enough he will surely improve.

CHAPTER TEN

I

The relations between Ralph and his employer became steadily more friendly. They were men of the same sort and pursued similar ends. They understood each other. Ralph envied Rauschuld his money and success, but he envied him without bitterness because he felt sure that he could do as well himself. Rauschuld appreciated Ralph's energy and acuteness, and especially his glib use of words, which was a gift that Rauschuld lacked. He attributed Ralph's superiority in this respect entirely to his education, for like most men who have little of it, he imagined that there is some almost magical value in formal schooling.

"You have a great advantage in your college career, Ralph," he told his secretary, as he glanced approvingly over a long and fulsome letter which Ralph had dictated. "I only went as far as the eighth grade myself. Then I had to stop school and go to work."

Ralph did not think it necessary to explain to him that his college career had consisted of one year at Perdue, and that it had been devoted largely to poker and to the management of the freshman football team.

He made a specialty of paying deft compliments to the Congressman.

"That little clash you had with Kelly in the Naval Committee this morning seems to be attracting quite a bit of attention in the press gallery," he remarked one day.

"I think the Chicago papers will carry a story on it tomorrow."

As a matter of fact Ralph himself had diligently spread this bit of news. He had persuaded one of the Chicago newspaper men to write a story about it as a personal favour. and had then foisted it upon all the others by telling them that a rival was going to play it up. But he was too shrewd to claim all the credit for himself. Flattery was an art for which he had a marked aptitude.

2

This useful alliance between two congenial spirits was to some extent marred by a third presence in the office—that of Ethel Connor, the stenographer. She was pretty and provocative. Inevitably both of the men looked at her with some interest, and each of them was eager to conceal his interest from the other. Ethel was delightedly aware of this situation. She now liked her job exactly twice as well as she had liked it when there was only one man in the office.

Her conduct was a model of tact and decorum. She was quiet and diligent. When the three of them were together in the office, her soft brown eyes were always upon her work.

When the Congressman was out, Ethel and Ralph inevitably fell into conversation, but for a long time it was conversation of the most impersonal sort. They talked of the weather and the movies and the dulness of Washington life. They did not trust each other. Neither was willing to take the responsibility of starting a flirtation. In fact, both were in a measure sincerely desirous of avoiding one. They had good jobs and did not want to risk losing them. Ralph, moreover, had always considered it one of his inviolable principles not to mix love and business.

"Never flirt with the help—there are plenty of other

girls," was a motto which had been laid down to him by old Thorne of Thorne and Amherst, and it had struck him as sound. Money-making was the really sacred and important occupation of life, and to let love-making interfere with it was folly.

Besides, he was exceedingly wary of entanglements which might pull him down toward matrimony. He fully intended to marry some day, but he meant to be well established in life first, and to marry a girl who would contribute substantially to that establishment.

He and Ethel briefly discussed this subject of marriage once, when a secretary in a neighbouring office had married on no other resources than his salary.

"He's got a nerve," Ralph remarked, "marrying on fifteen hundred a year."

"You mean she has," Ethel countered. "Remember, she's the one that will have to keep house on next to nothing. I bet she wishes she had her job and her freedom back inside a year."

"For my part, I can't see marriage," Ralph observed, feeling that this was a good opportunity to make his position clear. "It's too much of a handicap."

"Neither can I," Ethel agreed. "I can make a good living and I like my work. Why should I marry?"

"I've heard lots of girls say that," Ralph observed sceptically. "But I notice they nearly always get married when the chance comes."

"Well, if a man with a million dollars came along and made me love him," Ethel admitted, "I suppose it would be different. But I haven't seen the man yet that I would consider for an instant."

"Yes, but how about love?" Ralph ventured cautiously. "Are you willing to pass that up, too?"

Ethel, who had paused with her hands on the keys of her machine, now began to write furiously, without looking up or making any reply. Ralph sat looking at her shapely young back, admiring her round white neck, and wondering whether she were offended. The girl provoked his curiosity. She irritated him because he could not ignore her as he wanted to do. In spite of his intention his eyes followed her about the office. Her figure was rather full, but decidedly good, and her walk was the very gait of coquetry, imparting a rhythmic movement to her whole body.

"I wonder what her game is," he said to himself many times. Like most unreflective men he imagined that the motives of others were like his own, and could not conceive of any radically different. Full of subtle schemes himself, he was always trying to discover the secret schemes of others. What was Ethel up to? She had apparently wished to make it clear to him that she was not setting any matrimonial traps in his path, and for that he was grateful. But neither did she seem to want to flirt with him, and that hurt his vanity. Every man cherishes a secret belief, which nothing will quite destroy, that if he is but seen at his best and in the right light he has a practically irresistible appeal to women. This theory had been fostered in Ralph by the fact that he had enjoyed a great deal of success. The presence of a woman who showed no interest in him was as uncomfortable as a pebble in his shoe.

One evening about five o'clock he returned to the office from a trip to the Treasury Department and found the Congressman dictating to Ethel.

"You may go, Ralph," Rauschuld said briefly, and went on with his letter.

Ralph went out feeling a faint twinge of jealousy. He sat down on a bench in Capitol Park and lit a cigarette, not

acknowledging to himself that he was spying, but keeping an eye nevertheless on the door of the House Office Building. In about fifteen minutes the Congressman and Ethel came out and entered Rauschuld's limousine. They were laughing and talking with much animation, and it seemed to Ralph that the Congressman helped the girl into the car as though she had been a paralytic.

"So that's her game!" he thought. It was true that Rauschuld might be merely taking his stenographer home as a recompense for having kept her after regular working hours, but it seemed most probable to Ralph that there was some other relation between the two than that of employer and employé. He knew that Rauschuld was married to a woman older than himself, and suspected from bits of gossip he had heard that she no longer held him to a strict marital fidelity.

For some days thereafter Ralph maintained toward Ethel an attitude of dignified silent aloofness. He resolutely kept his eyes away from her, spoke to her only when it was necessary in the course of the work, and then somewhat formally. Ethel inevitably noticed this change of manner. She glanced at him now and then with a reproachful and questioning look, and she tried several times to renew their pleasant conversations when the Congressman was out of the office. Finding herself rebuffed at every approach, she became piqued and easily outdid him in the matter of cool politeness.

In this way there grew between the two a sense of increasing tension, which was really more dangerous to the stability of their relations than the easy familiarity which they had enjoyed before. While prudence was holding them apart, youth and propinquity were pushing them together. They were two young things, splendidly alive, aching for

adventure, and staring at each other through a fence of fear and distrust which each blamed the other for building. This situation presaged an emotional explosion as surely as an accumulating summer sultriness forecasts a thunderstorm.

It came one day when Ethel tried to get some filing covers from the top of the filing case which was almost eight feet high. She brought a chair into service and stood on tiptoe, stretching her lithe young body into revealing postures, but was unable to reach what she wanted. Ralph sat across the room, watching her in gloomy but interested silence. She turned upon him in sudden irritation:

"I suppose it would be too much to ask you to help me," she snapped.

Ralph slouched across the room.

"Get down," he suggested, "and I'll see if I can reach them."

"No," she fussed. "You don't know which ones I want. . . . "

"Well, then, here goes," he replied, and seizing her tightly about the knees he hove her up on his shoulder so that she commanded the whole top of the filing case.

"What do you mean?" she demanded indignantly. "Put me down at once!"

"You had better get what you want first, while you're up there," Ralph countered imperturbably.

"Put me down, I say!" she shrilled. "I never heard of such a thing!' She tried to kick but found that her legs were in firm duress.

Ralph let her slide slowly down through his arms until her toes touched the floor, then squeezing her with all his strength, he kissed her hard on the mouth.

"Oh!" she gasped explosively. Pushing his head back with both hands she tore herself free and dealt him a stinging slap on the ear. For a moment they stood facing each other with flushed faces and flashing eyes. Then she turned away suddenly, threw herself into a large leather chair, buried her face in her hands and began to weep in gasping sobs that shook her from waist to shoulder.

Ralph stood staring at her for a moment, checked and bewildered as a man always is when a woman takes to tears. Then he went and sat on the arm of the chair, and put a hand upon her hair, as gentle now as he had been violent a minute before.

"I'm sorry, Ethel," he said. "Please don't cry. . . . You know, I love you. . . . "

She pushed him away, but somewhat feebly. The crisis was over, her resistance was broken. He persisted gently, got his arms around her, kissed her awkwardly on her neck and ear.

Her sobs had fortunately subsided when they heard a step in the hall and a hand on the door. Ethel crossed the floor in a bound which she could never have made by deliberate intention, and was clattering the keys of her machine diligently when the Congressman entered. Ralph faced him for a moment, flushed, somewhat disheveled as to his hair, and feeling decidedly awkward. Then he turned away and began shuffling some papers on his desk in a meaningless way.

The Congressman glanced quickly from one to the other. His little blue eyes had a hard resentful glitter of suspicion. There was not a trace of a smile on his face. He sat down at his desk and began reading and signing letters without a word.

Ethel plead a headache and went home early. When she had gone the Congressman cleared his throat and addressed his secretary.

"There is one thing I meant to say to you, Ralph, when you first came into the office, and I think I had better say it now. I have always made it a principle not to tolerate any flirtations among my employés. It hurts the morale of an office. I don't mean to imply that I suspect you of any impropriety, but I think we had better understand each other on that point."

He spoke quietly and politely, but none-the-less he spoke as a feudal lord to a retainer, asserting his right of seignorage.

"Certainly," Ralph agreed. "You are right about that. I am sure you won't have any cause to complain, as far as I am concerned."

His words were as smooth as strained honey, but they hid an inevitable resentment.

3

The next day was a Sunday, and Ralph, in a spirit of some trepidation, called up Ethel at her home. Like most men of unreflecting mind, he had little understanding of the moods and motives of women. Love-making was to him a purely empirical science. He had discovered that many women would hold him at arms' length just as long as he docilely accepted that position, while if he seized them boldly and hung on during a preliminary storm of righteous protest, he often emerged triumphant, with the unresisting prize in his arms. On the basis of this discovery he had evolved a technique of admirable directness, which often—but not always—won him sudden and surprising victories.

He was not at all sure now whether he had made a con-

quest of Ethel or an enemy, and he had also a twinge of fear lest she might feel called upon to report his conduct to the Congressman. He had resolved, therefore, to call upon her if he could, and to offer his apologies, his caresses, or whatever else the situation might seem to call for.

To his immense relief she answered the telephone in a voice full of sweetness and invited him out to dinner.

Ethel lived in Cleveland Park with her brother who was married and had two shall children. He was an employé of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, where he spent his days checking and sorting newly made money by the millions of dollars. Like so many of the Civil Service employés in Washington, he had left a farm to win a place in city life somewhat more genteel and less laborious than that of a poor farmer. He had begun working at nine hundred dollars a year and in ten years had advanced to a salary of two thousand. In another ten years he might reasonably hope to be assistant superintendent earning a salary of four thousand.

He had married a girl employed as a stenographer in the Bureau, and for a time she had held her position in order that they might buy a lot and build a home, which they would pay for on the instalment plan. When the neat little bungalow had been completed, furnished throughout in mahogany and equipped with all the latest labour-saving devices, Mrs. Connor had resigned her position and presented her husband, in rapid succession, with a boy and a girl. This, too, had been a part of their plan, for both of them would have regarded marriage without children as immoral. They had realized their whole dream of what life should be with unusual completeness and success.

Mrs. Connor, an ample, rosy brunette with a resolute mouth, gave Ralph a friendly welcome to her house.

"We've heard a lot about you from Ethel," she told him. "I'm always glad to meet her friends. I hope you'll come often."

Ralph thanked her and said something graceful about the house. Mrs. Connor needed no further encouragement to take him on a tour of the entire establishment, from the electric laundry machine in the basement to the two rosy, polished-looking infants in the nursery. In matters of furniture and decoration she had striven rather to conform to a widely accepted standard of comfort and elegance than to achieve originality, and she had succeeded admirably, for her house was in most ways just like a million other suburban bungalows. Her individuality emerged only in the kitchen, which was as neat and highly organized as a battleship, and decidedly the most interesting room in the house, with its electric toaster and dishwasher, its fireless cooker and huge shining gas range where Sunday dinner bubbled and steamed and spoke enticingly to the nose of chicken and dumplings and cauliflower.

The sweeping was done in this house with a vacuum machine and the dishes were trundled to and from the kitchen on a little wheeled table. The children were fed according to scientific formula. *Good Housekeeping* and *The Ladies' Home Journal* were its bibles. Dr. Wiley and Mr. Bok seemed to dwell there in spirit, blessing the place like good fairies with hygiene, efficiency and virtue.

Ralph expressed his admiration for all this highly organized domesticity.

"When you have two small children to take care of and all your housework to do, you need system, I can tell you," Mrs. Connor explained. "As it is it keeps me on the jump from morning till night seven days a week. Seems like

I never can find time for anything else. Before I got married I was a good tennis player. Never think it to look at me now, would you? And I used to sing, too. Lots of people told me I ought to go on the stage. I meant to keep up both. But I haven't sung a note or hit a tennis ball in three years. Seems too bad a person has to give up so much, but what would become of the world if we all went running around doing what we like to do? Our first duty is to make homes and raise children, and I'm doing the best I can—that's what comforts me for any sacrifices I've made. I think it's downright immoral the way lots of young girls do nowadays, giving all their time to society and sports and not showing any interest in children or housework. Ethel has some pretty wild ideas herself. She's studying Spanish and she says she's going to South America, where stenographers that know both languages make big salaries, and then she's coming back with a lot of money to open a stenographic bureau of her own, and I don't know what-all. I wish to goodness she'd marry and settle down like she ought to."

She said this last with a look at Ralph which might have been considered significant, and which gave him a faint, vague feeling of guilty uneasiness. He felt somewhat as he had been wont to feel years ago, when his mother had called him from the kitchen window to come home early so that he could take his Saturday night bath and study his catechism. He had generally gone swimming instead. He was glad that Ethel had her eye on South America.

Mr. Connor presently appeared, yawning and grinning after a Sunday afternoon nap.

"He's an awful snoozer," Ethel explained as she presented him to Ralph. "He's nearly always asleep except

when he's working. The only time he really wakes up is when he goes down town to play duckpins on Saturday night."

Mr. Connor, although a comparatively young man, was both grey and bald, and had a shrunken look which contrasted sharply with the rosy plumpness of his spouse. He offered Ralph a cigar and invited him to go out and inspect the garden in the back yard.

Although no larger than two blankets, this garden was probably one of the most highly cultivated spots on earth. Mr. Connor explained with pride how he had literally built the soil to suit his needs with fertilizers and with leaf mould from Rock Creek Park. He pointed out his butter beans, which were just beginning a long climb up the little wooden trellises, his infant watermelon vines, his early lettuce and radishes which were already appearing on the family table.

"I'm a farmer by rights," he told Ralph. "I always intended to save money and get a little place in the country where I could raise blooded stock. (He pronounced it stalk.) But you can't get much ahead in this government game and my wife and I could never agree about it anyhow. Now she thinks she'd like to go to New York and hear concerts and things. I'd just as soon hear the wind blow down the chimney myself. So we kind of compromise by staying here, and I guess that's what we've got to do anyhow. . . . After you're married the kids are the main thing."

"Yes, sure they are," Ralph politely agreed. He felt a mild, unreasoning contempt for this worn-looking man, who was so hopelessly harnessed to his wife and his babies and his neat little house, and so resigned to a destiny of meaningless routine.

The two presented a sharp and significant contrast.

Ralph was like a wild animal, alert and ruthless, as are all living things that survive in freedom. Connor was a domestic creature, secure and gentle, but dull and collar-rubbed.

5

The dinner was good and very much a family affair, with the two-year-old son sitting in his high chair and demanding the attention of every one with a resolute egotism by hammering on the table with a spoon. To quiet him he was given the leg bone of a chicken to suck. Presently he was inspired to pat Ralph affectionately on the head with this. Being reprimanded he went on the warpath, threw the chicken bone at his father, and was finally carried up stairs yelling with rage against a world which seemed determined to ignore and thwart him from the very beginning.

After dinner they sat around and talked, Mrs. Connor carrying the bulk of the conversation. Her husband was sent upstairs about eight o'clock to put the children to bed, and after that he sat quietly, looking bored and yawning frequently in spite of his afternoon nap. Ralph listened politely to his hostess and kept his eyes with difficulty away from Ethel. She wore a blouse of cream-coloured Georgette crêpe which left her splendid neck fully exposed and revealed faintly the tender tints and contours of her flesh. She had the high colour and bright eyes of the woman who sits in delighted, expectant wonder before a flame her beauty has created.

Mrs. Connor at last followed her husband reluctantly to bed. The two young persons sat silent until the footfalls upstairs had ceased, Ethel looking down at her hands in

her lap and smiling a little. Ralph walked to where she sat, put his arms around her, tilted her head back and kissed her audibly on the lips. She pushed him away.

"Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh!" she warned in a low voice. "Ruth has ears like a bat. And besides, I don't want you to do things like that."

A little later they adjourned to the porch and sat in the swing. There they were safe from the ears of Ruth, but a light on the corner lent them a faint publicity. Ralph nevertheless took Ethel firmly in his arms.

"You mustn't," she protested, although her voice was a good deal less menacing than her words. "If you don't let me go I'll scream."

"All right," said Ralph. "Go ahead and scream, and then we will be in a pickle, because I'm not going to let you go."

In the face of such ruthless piracy Ethel was helpless. She was kissed repeatedly, but always against her will. Her hair was mussed, but her integrity remained intact.

The suburban street was quiet and vaguely beautiful, its ugly little new houses buried in gloom through which a yellow light pierced here and there. It was lined with maple trees which rustled softly in the night breeze, seeming to raise their voices now that the human racket had subsided, filling the air with a forest murmur—a suggestion of the wildness and freedom of unspoiled earth. Far away some one was playing "Little Gypsy Sweetheart" on a piano.

Ralph drew Ethel closer to him. Her lips clung to his willingly now. For an hour they were almost motionless. They had escaped from time and circumstance—from all the sharp fears and inhibitions that surround love like a circle of hostile swords. Suddenly a distant bell began

to toll. Ethel jerked upright like an awakening sleeper.

"Good Lord, twelve o'clock," she exclaimed. "You must go. Ruth'll give me the dickens. She never goes to sleep as long as I have company."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

Although she looked younger, Ethel Connor was twenty-six years old, and although she achieved a convincing manner of sweet innocence, she had some bitter knowledge of life and men. Five years before she had sincerely fallen in love with a young lawyer in the Public Lands Office. He was a Texan. There followed an engagement of the terrible kind so common in America, which dragged on month after month, toward a marriage which was to be sometime when the young man was making more money. Ethel was romantic and a little reckless. She endured for a long while the tri-weekly course in furtive parlour petting, which is considered appropriate to such a situation, and then surrendered herself in a moment of desperation. After a brief, dangerous and unsatisfying career in love, the young man went back to Texas to practice law. He wrote to her for a while, then forgot about her and ultimately married another and purer girl.

This affair left Ethel the difficult heritage of a sceptical, disillusioned attitude toward love, men and marriage. She had been raised in the cult of the perfect lady, which teaches that good women are as free of sinful desire as Swedenborgian angels, and that its manifestation in the male is a coarse and disgusting thing which must be borne for the sake of the coming generations, but never cherished for itself. Her experience with the young Texan had been to some ex-

tent a confirmation of this last tenet. After his departure she had turned strongly in reaction to the consolations of respectability. The memory of that incident was painful and so she forgot it. In effect she resumed her innocence, she repudiated her fall. Women can do such things, for they are not as much the slaves of fact as are men. If Eve had found the apple sour she would have proclaimed the serpent a myth, and all the angels in heaven could not have convinced her that she had sinned.

But this repudiation on the part of Ethel was subtly qualified by the existence within her of a longing. Like so many women who are at once vital and sensitive, she was the victim of a dualism which could by no means be resolved. Consciously and outwardly she was a Christian angel of immaculate conduct, and yet there lurked within her a grinning pagan imp whom she snubbed and ignored but could never escape. She even had a sort of perverse affection for him.

Her unhappiness was further complicated by the fact that marriage no longer seemed to her as desirable as once it had. Through the mists of a first love, married life in a mortgaged bungalow had looked delectable, but in the light of disillusionment she saw it more realistically. The men within her reach were nearly all government clerks whose modest earnings were predictable for years to come. A life of plodding monotony, such as that of her sister-in-law, was what they offered her, and it made little appeal. For Ethel was more a flirt than a potential mother. She was the kind of woman to whom the lover means more than the child and adventure more than contentment, whose mission is to charm, disturb and stimulate man rather than to cook his meals and bear his children.

Unfortunately the society in which she lived did not recog-

nize the existence of this eternal and indispensable type of woman, and Ethel, finding herself thwarted in love, had turned all her energy and imagination toward work. In Washington she had before her the example of thousands of women who made their own livings, and of a few who achieved a real independence and success. She was energetic and competent, and she resolved to be one of these latter and to ignore the difficult problem of love.

But it refused to be ignored. It bobbed up immediately in the form of her employer, the Hon. Mr. Rauschuld, who showed a keen interest in his pretty stenographer from the first. Since he was a married man this interest could scarcely be considered proper, but in its manifestations it was wholly respectful. To Rauschuld, as to most American males, there were two kinds of women—those who never gave themselves except in marriage, and those who did. The first kind was a goddess to be worshipped, no matter what her other faults—a sacred embodiment of the social ideal— and the second kind was a forbidden luxury to be secretly enjoyed. He hoped that Ethel belonged to the second class, but as far as he could discover she belonged to the first.

Ethel had no intention of letting him discover anything else. The admiration of this man was exceedingly sweet to her vanity. She was impressed by his success, his wealth, his smartness. He was a symbol of that elegant respectability toward which she yearned. And she understood perfectly his point-of-view. She knew that she could not have both his admiration and his love, and she chose to keep the former by skilfully holding him at a respectful distance.

This was made easier by the fact of the Congressman's plebeian beginning. For all his external splendour and his touch of arrogance, he was at heart still a bricklayer. Ethel

was to him a lady of the class he had striven so hard to enter. He would make firm resolutions to break down her resistance and to have his way with her, but when she met his advances with cool indignant surprise, he was humbled, he blushed and apologized and became more infatuated than ever. He raised her salary to the exhorbitant figure of a hundred and fifty dollars a month, feeling that he was thereby compromising her, but Ethel loftily accepted this as a just tribute to her ability, and he got nothing for his money but sweet thanks.

Necessarily, under these circumstances, their relations outside the office were limited and difficult. Ethel allowed him to drive her home once in a while, and still more rarely she took lunch or dinner with him.

The first time he proposed this latter she gracefully demurred.

"I think that would hardly be proper, Mr. Rauschuld," she said. "I would not for the world do anything that your wife might disapprove."

"My wife is not at all jealous," he assured her. "She won't misunderstand my friendly interest in an employé."

Ethel looked sceptical, but accepted the invitation with the proviso that his wife should know all about it.

The first time they dined together, in order to impress her, he took her to the fashionable Chevy Chase Country Club. Ethel was duly impressed, for she had never been there before. She was presented to a Senator and a General, both of whom looked at her with polite interest, and she felt that she was moving in very distinguished company.

The next time she consented to go out with the Congressman he told her of a quaint little place he wanted to show her. It turned out to be a roadhouse on the Baltimore pike, and he tried to lead her into a private dining room, but she

insisted on dining in public. The Congressman was irritated, and yet he respected her decision.

In course of time, as he still failed to penetrate her armour of propriety, he developed the moodiness of the deeply infatuated man. Once, when they had been to lunch together, he seized her in the car with a sudden access of resolution, and kissed her by main force. She threatened to get out at once, and when she was prevailed upon not to be foolish, she refused to speak to him all the way home. Afterwards he was struck by a fear that she might not come to work the next day. He called her up and made an agonized apology, which she accepted with condescending sweetness. After that she had him at her mercy.

2

These barriers of pose and manner which were so successful against the Congressman, seemed not to exist for Ralph. He had walked right through them. She found herself in his arms before she knew it, and the contact had started a rush of emotion which had carried away her defences completely.

Ethel did not allow this complicated situation to worry her in the least. In fact, she did not think about it at all, or even admit its existence to herself. She merely enjoyed it. She wanted both of these men, each of whom answered a separate need of her nature. She continued to go out with Rauschuld and to relish the sweetness of thwarting and humbling an important and successful man. She continued also to see Ralph, and enjoyed all the more by contrast his brutal and compelling methods.

Doubtless she would have been content with one man who was both lover and worshipper, who could have grasped the fact that woman is at once a Goddess of sacred mysteries and

a demoness of scarlet delight. But since she found only imperfect creatures—pieces of men, so to speak—there was a certain practical justice in using two of them to meet her need.

Neither did she allow the situation to impair her self-respect. With that astonishing spiritual ingenuity which woman has been forced to develop in a society hostile to a large part of her nature, she contrived always to find herself in the right. Although her relations with Ralph became more and more intimate, she made it clear that this was against her wish and that a purely "platonic" relation was all she could sanction.

"Now you've got to promise me that you'll behave," she would stipulate, when they were starting for a walk in Rock Creek Park. Ralph would always promise, and the promise would always be broken.

"I think you're horrid!" she exclaimed after some especially bold aggression on his part. "If that's the way you're going to act, I simply will *not* go out with you any more."

Ralph appeared contrite and for a while they walked along in hostile silence. But in a Maytime world of newly greening forest, spangled with white blossoms of dogwood, filled with the scent of bud and flower and the voices of red birds and robins, she found it impossible to stand for long upon a rather uncomfortable dignity. She began to hum a song, and then to smile, and presently she had to be helped over a puddle, and the trouble began all over again.

Once, as they were descending a beautiful grassy slope with a breeze in their faces and nothing but sky and forest about, she gave way to an absurd impulse, slapped Ralph in the face by way of a challenge, and dashed away down the hill with him in hot pursuit. He caught her and they tumbled in a heap. But they jumped up again suddenly,

for just then a party of horsemen rode out of the woods, and passed by with broad grins. Ethel hid her face in maidenly shame. She was furiously embarrassed and indignant.

"Haven't you any sense at all?" she demanded.

Ralph grinned and accepted his ignominy with good grace. Having a thick skin and a tough conscience he was perfectly willing to bear the entire burden of indiscretion and blame.

Always society seemed to be on the side of Ethel in her fight for decorum. It was incredibly hard for them to be securely alone. Policemen patrolled the park with a special eye for too sentimental couples, and interested peepers seemed to lurk behind every bush. At home Mrs. Connor kept an alert watch on her pretty young sister-in-law. Ethel's well-being was a responsibility which she took upon herself and never shirked.

They went to Glen Echo and rode the roller-coasters with delicious thrills, but found that dark corners had been carefully abolished and that dancing was properly censored. They went on a boat ride to Marshall Hall, and a searchlight roamed the deck of the boat and picked out spooning couples for the uproarious amusement of the passengers. But they achieved many stolen kisses in spite of all these handicaps.

3

It was she who first suggested that they go canoeing. She knew nothing about the sport, she explained, but a girl friend had told her it was great fun. Ralph knew how to paddle a canoe, and so they found themselves journeying to Georgetown one fine June evening.

The river lay still and green at the foot of the hill upon

which sat the old town. Its far bank was steep and heavily wooded, with here and there a sheer rock wall where stone had been quarried. Once this waterfront had been a port, but now it was almost wholly given over to pleasure. Boat clubs and public boathouses lined its townward shore, while at the foot of the forested hill on the other side sat a long row of little white camps. Roofed-over rafts, which had been converted into floating dance halls and soft-drinks stands, were anchored here and there. Motor boats chugged up and down, and canoes were scattered all over the river. Everywhere were sunburned young men in flannels and jerseys, and pretty girls in middy blouses and tennis shoes. Boys noisily went swimming from some rafts, and a long row of negroes patiently angled for catfish in the canal which paralleled the river. The whole place had the lazy, happy air of a pleasure resort which belongs largely to youth and has escaped the blight of being fashionable.

Ralph and Ethel got a canoe and he paddled slowly up the stream. As dusk fell upon the river it became a fairy-land. The ugliness of wooden buildings was buried in darkness, and there remained only the vague bulk of wooded hill and the dark mirror of water, holding the long yellow reflections of a thousand little lights from camp and raft. Music of phonograph and mandolin and of boys and girls singing made a continuous murmur of melody.

As the evening deepened more and more canoes put out. There were hundreds of them, and every canoe contained a couple. They rested and drifted in the heavy black shadows of the wooded banks, and nestled like wild fowl upon reed-grown islands and bars. Here were no policemen and no prying, curious eyes. Here lovers had found a precarious floating sanctuary. Every year a good many couples upset

their frail craft, and every year a few were drowned, but such hazards were no deterrent. Each fine summer night this fleet of Eros set out with its cargo of romance.

In a canoe Ethel's high principles were heavily handicapped by the physical circumstances of the situation. And the atmosphere of the river weakened her resolution. Moonlight and music wooed her more subtly than her lover. Here the ardent and reckless spirit of youth seemed to charge the very air with an exotic quality of abandon. She threatened that each expedition should be the last, but always she came again, fortified by Ralph's promise of good conduct.

She was full of disapproval and reproach to the very last. Like the Greeks at Thermopylæ, she was overwhelmed but she never surrendered. She accepted no responsibility for what happened.

It was the same way when Ralph suggested going to his apartment. She rejected the suggestion without compromise. Ralph brought forward weighty practical arguments. A canoe was all right in summer, though not precisely ideal even then, but winter was coming on. It was a quiet place. No one she knew lived anywhere near it.

She would listen to none of this. It was most improper for a young woman to go to a gentleman's apartment without a chaperon, and she would not consider it. But she finally did go, out of curiosity, just for a few minutes, and after that she went again.

3

For a time they were very happy. By an unspoken agreement they were carefully decorous in the office, and when they were out together they avoided places where

Congressman Rauschuld might be encountered. They believed that he was unaware of their attachment.

He encouraged them in that belief, for he had a plan of his own. He had long been watching them with the mordant acuteness born of jealousy—the hard, bitter jealousy of a middle-aged man who sees a younger one succeeding where he has failed.

One day he announced his intention of going to New York. He had brought his suitcase to the office. He called a taxicab and went out with a word of cheerful farewell, followed by the driver bearing his luggage.

When he had gone Ralph walked over to Ethel, who was putting some letters in the filing case, took her in his arms and kissed her slowly and deliberately. It gave him pleasure to do this because he knew it was forbidden. He had never forgiven Rauschuld that first warning. He had triumphed over his employer, and he loved to cap his triumph by enjoying his woman here, in the very stronghold of his rival.

The Congressman opened the door so quietly that they did not hear him. Ethel glimpsed him over Ralph's shoulder, and they jumped apart, flushed and speechless. She turned away in confusion, and the two men faced each other.

Ralph was startled by the look of rage in Rauschuld's face. He was darkly flushed, his mouth worked a little, and his eyes were fighting blue blazes. All the bitter emotion of a thwarted desire and a suppressed jealousy was in them. For a moment Ralph thought the man was going to hit him, and he clenched his fists. But Rauschuld's powerful sense of his own hard-won dignity prevailed.

"Dolan," he said in a carefully controlled voice. "Get

out of this office! I will send you a check for what I owe you."

Ralph hesitated for a moment, glanced around at Ethel, who was looking out the window, then took his hat and went.

He heard the bolt of the door click behind him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

It was two weeks later that he first saw Ethel again, for she had gone away upon a vacation trip immediately after the incident in Rauschuld's office.

It was a quiet, pale and, to all outward seeming, a rather cool Ethel who received him this time. She informed him briefly that she was leaving for New York within a few days to sail for South America.

When she had said this, they sat silent for a moment. A constraint of painful intensity lay upon them both. Ethel was making a desperate play for what she really wanted, and Ralph was the victim of a confusing inner conflict, which he only half understood himself. He did not know what to say.

"I suppose you could have held your job if you had wanted to," he hazarded at last.

"Yes, I could have held it," she replied quietly. "On his terms."

After an uncomfortable pause he said:

"You're lucky to have this chance to go to Rio—if that is really what you want to do."

"I've had the chance for a long time, as a matter of fact," she told him. "A man I used to work for is in one of the big importing companies down there. He said he would give me a job any time I wanted to come."

"Do you really want to go?" Ralph enquired.

"I guess I do," Ethel replied. Her voice trembled a little. "I've always said I did. Anyway, I can't go on like this . . . indefinitely. . . ."

She was near to tears and Ralph was as uncomfortable as a man sitting on a tack. He understood now as well as though she had told him in so many words that she wanted him to marry her—that she was offering him the choice between that and losing her. And powerful instincts urged him to hold her. Between them was that bond which unites a man and woman who have truly held each other, and which is never quite severed or forgotten. He was not a man of fine emotions, but he was bound to her by all the force of his rich vitality. And he came of a long line of men who had married and raised families. Flesh and tradition alike urged him to hold this woman who was his mate. But against them was the even stronger impulse toward freedom which was the most distinctive thing about him. He had the simple needs of the common man. No dream or inspiration lured him from the path of common destiny. But he was unusually self-sufficient and fearless. He had little reverence for institutions because he had not the weakling's need of their protection and support. In the light of his self-reliant spirit, he sensed the fact that they are but forms of a bondage in which the few hold the many, and that the sentimental reverence which surrounds them is the gilding on the bars. Marriage had always seemed to him a prison, and now, in an imaginative flash born of strong emotion, he suddenly visualized the reality of it. He pictured himself as the owner of a little bungalow like this one he was in, with an endless mortgage hanging over his head, with a woman holding him in legal bonds, with children perhaps—he, the lover of open roads and fresh adventures. It seemed to him suddenly that he was sitting

in a trap, with a tempting bait before his nose, and that the trap might shut at any moment and hold him forever.

He was on his feet and holding out his hand.

"Ethel," he said, speaking with difficulty, "I wish you luck!"

She stood facing him, pale, with trembling lips.

"O, Ralph," she cried. And in her voice and in her eyes were a great desire and a great distress. Her ambition, her independence, her scorn of humble happiness had all gone down before the massive feminine instinct to hold her man at any cost.

Ralph seized her by the shoulders, kissed her hard on the mouth, pushed her away, and went out, slamming the door. He ran all the way to the car line.

2

For the next few days Ralph was more depressed and discouraged than he had ever been before. He missed Ethel and he felt that his career had met with a serious check. He had been a little more than a year in Washington now, and until his discharge from Rauschuld's office, it had seemed to be a year of steady progress. He had built great hopes on his connection with the Congressman, who, he believed, would have shown him the way into both politics and society. Now he must begin over.

He got drunk several times and made a precarious living at pool and poker. His roving instinct reasserted itself, and he would undoubtedly have left Washington if he had won a substantial stake, but he had not money enough to manage a move.

It was Henry Lambert who came to his rescue. Henry was now a star reporter on the Washington *Sun*. That paper was planning to enlarge its staff to the extent of one

cub reporter at ten dollars a week, and Henry thought he could get Ralph the job.

"It doesn't pay anything, of course," he explained. "But if you make good they'll raise you in a short time, and after you've had a little experience you can get a better job somewhere else."

Ralph took the place because he had nothing better in sight, and because he was always eager to exercise what he regarded as his talent for writing.

The Washington *Sun* was not at that time the great metropolitan newspaper which it has since become. In fact, it was considered the joke-newspaper of the town. It was housed in a narrow two-story building on New York Avenue. Except for a small corner office in which the managing editor was sequestered, its entire editorial department was confined to a single room on the second floor. This place was much like the newspaper offices which are described in magazine short stories, but are happily rare in reality. It was filled with the clatter of typewriters and the noise of machinery from the composing room just behind the editorial department. Its floor was littered with copy paper and clippings. Reporters ran noisily in and out. The chief of the composing-room, a fat man stripped to his undershirt and wearing a large dirty apron, would frequently invade the editorial room profanely urging the city editor to "Cut it to the bone." "How the hell do you expect to get all this junk into a ten-page paper?" he would demand.

Ralph's part in the making of this newspaper was to attend upon many minor events which were of little news value, but still required the presence of a reporter. When the Tenleytown Citizens' Association met to discuss the mosquito problem, Ralph was there and had to sit through two hours of droning discussion. The District Rifle Associ-

ation held a meet at Congress Heights and Ralph waded a quarter of a mile through the mud to get the scores. The Department of Agriculture gave a flower show, and he had to make a tedious list of prize-winning posies. When he returned to the office with his findings, he never knew what to do with them. He could not decide where to begin, what to put in and what to leave out. After sitting helpless before his machine for awhile, he would usually apply to Henry for help. Henry would facilely dash off a lead for him, and then he would fill in the details and hand it to the city editor.

By midnight usually every one would have his copy finished, but the whole staff was held until one o'clock, and a dog watch of two men stayed until three. The late night and early morning hours were devoted to arguments and story-telling, to games of crap and seven-up, and to lunches of egg sandwiches and coffee at the all-night Greek lunch across the street.

The stars of the *Sun* staff were Henry Lambert, who wrote the most important local stories, and James Neal who attended to the House and Senate and the workings of the United States Government generally. He was a bright energetic boy of twenty-four, who had grown up in the newspaper game, starting as a copy boy at the age of fourteen, and he was the envy of the entire staff because he was reputed to make no less than fifty dollars a week. Only half of this amount was paid by the *Sun*. He earned the rest of it by acting as a press agent, covering committee hearings for New York newspapers, and by a variety of other odd jobs. Like the city editor, he carried a walking stick.

One of Neal's many positions was that of press agent for a certain Association for the Protection of American

Interests in Mexico. It was an organization of capitalists who owned land in Mexico, and its purpose was to instigate an invasion and conquest of that country by the forces of the United States.

Henry Lambert was at that time writing a series of Sunday articles for a Philadelphia paper, and Neal was always trying to persuade him to use a story about Mexican atrocities, illustrated with photographs of murdered Americans and with a map marked in red to show exactly where each American citizen had been slaughtered. If he could get this data published he would make a substantial amount.

"I'll go fifty-fifty with you on whatever I get out of it," he told Henry. "And I'll write the story myself. All you've got to do is to place it. What more do you want?"

"Sorry, Jim," said Henry diffidently. "I can't do it."

"Why not?" Neal demanded.

"Well," Henry explained reluctantly, "I don't think we ought to invade Mexico. The Mexicans haven't really done anything to us. It seems to me they've got a right to fight it out among themselves. If we went down there it would just be a case of murdering a few thousand peons to make money for these oil men of yours."

"For the love of Pete!" Neal exclaimed indignantly. "You talk as though you were President of the United States. What business of yours is it whether we invade Mexico or not? You can't get anywhere in this game if you're going to carry the whole world on your shoulders." Neal was sincerely disgusted. He was a thorough-going newspaperman, raised in the game, and its unwritten ethical code was as much a part of him as was his little finger. A primary article of that code is that a newspaperman shall write whatever he is paid to write, and leave all questions of policy to his employer. A good reporter has the same un-

reasoning loyalty to his job that makes a good soldier. "His not to reason why, his but to write the lie"—if a lie it happens to be, as is frequently the case.

A second article of the code is that one newspaperman shall always help another when he can.

For Henry to refuse good money and to withhold assistance from a fellow worker for the sake of his own opinions and ideas, struck Neal as an exhibition of intolerable egotism and selfishness. It bordered on the indecent.

Ralph sided strongly with Neal in this matter, and yet he felt an obscure admiration for Henry at the same time.

3

These two spent a good deal of time together, now, and one evening Henry took Ralph home to dinner with him.

The Lamberts lived in a flat of two small rooms, a bath and a kitchenette on Q Street. It was in a non-elevator apartment house with a musical Indian name, which meant "the place of swans." A maid came in every evening to cook dinner and serve it in the reception room, which was hastily converted into a dining room by a change of tablecloths.

Mrs. Lambert was a tiny, charming creature—a hundred pounds of essential femininity, with a large amount of light blond hair, soft brown eyes, a southern accent and a pretty bubbling laugh. Ralph, thinking of his lost Ethel, felt a twinge of envy for Henry's dovecote.

"Nice cosy place you've got here, Henry," he observed.

"You don't have to live in it," Henry reminded him gloomily. "You will observe that the window over there opens on a court. The windows of nineteen other flats also open on that court. Every one of those flats contains

either a squawling infant, a phonograph, a player piano, or a woman who has been told that she can sing. The wife of the man next door starts the player piano at eight o'clock every morning while she's washing the dishes. That wakes me up after about five hours of sleep. Then I go to work to the tune of "A Little Love, a Little Kiss" played on a Victrola in the flat across the way. They play it every morning just as regularly as the sun rises, and the janitor's kid doesn't like it and tries to howl it down. You can do anything in this place except read, work or sleep, and those are the only occupations I care much about."

"Never mind, Beautiful," Mrs. Lambert cooed. "When you finish that big book you're writing we'll be rich and have a house in the country."

Her voice had the lazy sweetness of a blackbird's song.

"You know I haven't written a line on that book for two months, Alice," Henry reproved her irritably. "What with doing the *Sun* work, and writing a Sunday spread every week, and getting the fraternal order news for the *Star,* I have about as much chance of writing a book as I have of going to Heaven."

"Henry, you're the most discontented man I ever met," Ralph remarked. "You wouldn't be satisfied in Heaven if you did get there."

"No," Henry agreed. "I wouldn't care for it. I have renounced my hope of immortality. I agree with Rémy de Gourmont that man should learn to be grateful for ultimate oblivion. I figure it will take me a good part of eternity to make up all the sleep that I'm losing here."

4

Ralph was profoundly dissatisfied with his work as a reporter. It was a bore in itself, and it was not paying

half of his expenses. He was always on the look-out for a better job, but jobs were scarce in Washington at that time.

One Saturday a rival paper published a special automobile section, which was filled with news of the automobile world, and with articles on the care and operation of cars, and with automobile advertising. Ralph carried it to the managing editor of the paper.

"I want you to make me automobile editor," he proposed. "All I want is twenty a week and a ten per cent. commission on all the advertising I get."

"What do you know about automobiles?" the editor asked.

"Nearly everything," Ralph assured him, "and what I don't know I can find out. Try me a week—that's all I ask."

The editor tried him, and Ralph went to work with the desperate energy of a man who is near to his last dollar. His first need was for about ten columns of copy on the subject of automobiles. This he got by paraphrasing articles from the files of old automobile journals which he found in the Library of Congress. He signed them with such pseudonyms as Spark Plug and Speed Limit. Having hastily completed this part of his task, he went out to solicit advertising. This was not very difficult, for the automobile business was then in the midst of its period of most rapid expansion. He began with the largest Ford Agency in town, tackling the general manager late one afternoon. He held this gentleman under a steady deluge of talk for twenty minutes. When his victim closed his desk and went out, Ralph followed him. The manager got into his car and Ralph got in beside him, talking desperately. The manager drove him to the *Sun* office and stopped. Ralph went on talking.

"This is where you get out, isn't it?" the manager enquired.

Ralph looked him steadily in the eye and held out his contract. "Not until you have signed," he replied. For a moment he thought he was going to be grabbed by the collar and thrown out of the car. Then a slow smile spread over the manager's face. He had the admiration for gall which is in every business man. He took out his fountain pen and signed.

This was a victory for Ralph. He was able to tell all of the other distributors that the Ford Agency had taken half a page in his automobile section, and that they could not afford to stay out. They agreed. Ralph pocketed sixty-five dollars at the end of the first week with a sigh of relief. The business manager of the paper immediately abolished the commission agreement and put him on a salary of forty dollars a week.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I

Although both his salary and his prospects for advancement were good, Ralph was by no means satisfied with his position on the *Sun*. The thing that interested him in Washington was the government, and the opportunities it afforded for easy advancement in wealth and social prestige. He longed to re-establish his contact with the capitol and the men of place and power who inhabited it, and he determined to do so in the capacity of a newspaper correspondent. It seemed to him now that this was an even better method of approach to opportunity than was the secretaryship which he had lost. A large number of the men prominent in public life had been correspondents at one time, and he was always hearing of newspapermen who got fat and easy places.

In general, the way to advancement in this, as in most lines of endeavor, was to win the friendship of older men who had already succeeded and to serve them faithfully. A young man such as Henry Lambert, who had ideas of his own and was determined to assert them, would inevitably fight a lone battle and win small booty. He would be regarded as unsafe and untractable. But for one who was willing to serve docilely the purposes of others and to lubricate his way with the greases of flattery, Washington offered unusual advantages. Indeed, one of the leading professions of our capital is cultivating the friendship of the

great. A man with an aptitude for this delicate art need never fear the pinch of want, nor yet need he undergo the strain of toil, while he may reasonably look forward to becoming a great man himself in due course and by natural succession.

Ralph knew one newspaperman who had made his living for years out of his friendly relations with a prominent retired army officer who had made a national reputation as an explorer and writer. Another young fellow, who had been the editor of a country paper, came to Washington as the secretary of a cabinet officer. When the cabinet officer retired to serve a great industrial association as general counsel at one hundred thousand dollars a year, his faithful secretary became his chief assistant at twenty-five thousand. Instances such as these were numerous. Every rising politician dragged up with him a bunch of lesser men who had clung cleverly to his coat-tails.

Ralph heard of these easy and lucrative advancements with an eager stirring of ambition and envy. He was not a born hero-worshipper, as were many of these successful young men, nor had he the instinctive loyalty to strength which goes with weakness. But he had that greatest of all qualifications for worldly success, a complete freedom from ideas of his own. He was perfectly willing to serve whatever person or project would pay best, because he had no purpose save his own advancement. His vision for the main chance was keen and unclouded.

As a first step toward becoming a newspaper correspondent he purchased a walking stick and joined the Press Club. The atmosphere of this establishment delighted him. He lunched every day at the round table, where his ears were tickled with all the latest political gossip. He took up the game of dominoes, which at that time chiefly engaged the

attention of correspondents off duty. It yielded him a good deal of small change and many valuable acquaintances. He went to all of the Press Club entertainments, at which the great were invited to make confidential addresses. He heard Uncle Joe Cannon tell the story of his boyhood and President Wilson confess his thwarted longing to be a good sport and his contempt for the brains of congressmen. No one dared to refuse an invitation from the Press Club, and all the notables appeared before it at one time or another to make speeches and shake hands. These events gave Ralph a pleasant sense of being up among the mighty and privy to important matters.

He missed no opportunity to make it known that he was a newspaperman looking for a connection which would take him into the press gallery. It was easy now for him to describe himself as a man of experience in the profession. He had been a press agent, a reporter on the *Sun* and was now automobile editor of that paper. On the strength of this record he was presently hired as a member of the Washington staff of the *Herald-Enquirer,* an important mid-western daily.

The capital bureau of this newspaper consisted of a chief correspondent, an assistant, a telegraph operator and an office boy. James Barton Otis was the chief and in theory at least he was a political seer rather than a reporter. While his assistant gathered those items of Washington news which were of special interest to the paper, but not important enough to be covered by the news associations, he devoted his attention exclusively to the great national events of the day. As all of the news about these was carried by the Associated Press, his function was limited to the writing of a lead, which was intended to interpret the mysteries of government to the reader and perhaps to bring

him something of the glamour and drama of it. His dispatches were signed with his name in full and were almost always on the front page.

Otis was to Ralph a mysterious and uncongenial figure. He was a short, stout man with an ugly, masklike face. deeply lined, with little unrevealing eyes peering narrowly over heavy pouches. Wholly lacking in that easy politeness which belongs to most newspapermen, he seemed to be full of resentments and irritations. His address was gruff and even insulting. When Ralph came into his office for instructions he would find the chief yawning over his morning papers.

"Go out and see what you can find," was his usual greeting. "It's about time you dug up something besides routine news."

Otis himself seldom went to the Capitol. Indeed he did not go outside his office in search of material once a week. And yet he managed to write a column or more about national politics almost every day. Apparently the chief sources upon which he drew were his imagination and the bar of the Shoreham Hotel. He would visit this latter a half dozen times in the course of the afternoon and evening. When Ralph came back to the office to write his copy, Otis would be seated at his desk, furiously masticating a big cigar and dashing off copy in longhand with a pencil, for he had never learned to use a typewriter. No one except his own telegraph operator could read his copy.

As each page was finished, he would bawl for the office boy to come and carry it to the wire. Once in a while he would rise and stride up and down the office, blowing clouds of smoke and spitting tobacco juice, chuckling and cursing to himself. He had the appearance and manner of a man in the throes of a great creative effort.

And a creative effort it truly was. Out of a smattering of rumour, he would build a glowing column of gossip and prediction. "The highest authority" and "an administration official who refuses to be quoted" and "a man close to the President" were the sources of information which he most frequently mentioned. But little as he had to say, he always managed to make it interesting. His English was of an almost classical precision and purity. He had a touch of sarcastic wit and a seeing eye for the drama of politics.

Like most newspapermen, he had little understanding of the underlying economic motives of the political scene, but he was full of the lore of its intrigues and personalities, and especially those of the Republican party. It was of this and of its plans for a return to power that he most frequently wrote.

He was, in fact, an artist of no mean gift who, for some reason of circumstance or personality, had been unable to find any better subject for his talent than the Republican party, or any better outlet for it than a conservative newspaper. Into this inadequate opening he poured all that he could of his creative fire, his scorn and his wit. With all his not inconsiderable might he tried to make of a newspaper column about the Republican party a thing of beauty and glamour and significance. It was an attempt foredoomed to failure. An intelligent man, he really saw the emptiness and futility of his subject. He could not even approach it until he was drunk. He hated both politics and the newspaper game as every man hates the forces that have thwarted his creative power.

Indeed, he was full of hatreds. Having found little to love, his intense and passionate nature flowed forth in a stream of pure venom. Theodore Roosevelt was a special

object of his hatred. He wrote about him whenever he had a chance, but being unable to express more than a shadow of his feeling in a newspaper column, he was always denouncing the Colonel to Ralph.

"There's a man that is just as much a menace to this country as ever Napoleon was to France," he would say. "He hasn't got a principle to his name. His one idea is to get power and more power. I wish to God I could write what I know about him and get it published. I'd show him up! I'd smash him so hard he'd never be able to lift his head again." There was a fury of malice in his words.

He had never met this object of his hatred for he had not been in Washington during the Roosevelt administration.

One day Roosevelt made a speech and held the usual informal reception at the Press Club.

"You go over and see what that crook has to say," Otis told Ralph. "I may drop in later, but I don't think I will. He's not worth walking two blocks to hear."

Nevertheless, when the Colonel had finished his speech and was receiving the correspondents, Ralph saw Otis standing in line, with a curiously constrained and sheepish expression on his face. As he drew nearer to the distinguished guest, his discomfort seemed to increase. He fidgeted and glanced around and moistened his lips with his tongue and cleared his throat. When at last he stood face to face with the Colonel, he stammered and blushed and could not get out a word. Afterwards he got very drunk, went back to his office and wrote a piece about Roosevelt so openly denunciatory that his paper dared not publish it.

Next to Colonel Roosevelt, he most hated the correspondent for the *Courier,* who was his chief rival. This man, James Kelleher, was wholly without Otis' grace and power as a writer, but he was an extremely active and efficient

reporter and for that reason made about twice as much money as Otis. Otis affected the greatest contempt for him.

"That little snip of a Kelleher can't write any more than a washwoman," he would say. "He works his head off to get a story and then he botches it. I don't see how he gets by."

2

Practically all of the actual work of getting news for the *Herald-Enquirer* devolved upon Ralph, but even so, his task was an easy and simple one. He had to keep in touch with all the members of the state delegation including the two senators and about twenty congressmen, and he had to visit daily the White House and several of the Departments in search of news with some special interest to his papers. But most of this news was not only easy to get but impossible to avoid. Congressmen and senators generally had their important disclosures written out and distributed, and the principal departments also handed out mimeographed sheets, known as flimsies, every day. A good pair of legs and a certain alertness were the real requisites of a correspondent.

Furthermore, all newspapermen lived in constant fear of being scooped and for this reason they zealously protected each other. In the long room behind the press gallery, where correspondents dozed on leather sofas, smoked and gossiped, Ralph would meet the representatives of the rival papers, and trade journalistic goods with them. If an item of news was given to one of these men orally, it was almost always with the specification that it be shared with all of the others, and such a trust was sacred to the reporter. A man who observed the fine co-operative code of the profession could scarcely go wrong, while one who sought to defy it would soon find his position untenable.

There were such things as "beats"—that is, stories which a man had a right to keep for his exclusive use—but they were few, and usually they were deft combinations of fancy and rumour. It was chiefly in the concocting of these that the clever newspaperman excelled his fellows and enhanced his reputation.

One day Roger Sullivan, the famous Democratic boss of Chicago, was in Washington. He issued a perfunctory statement for all of the newspaper correspondents, and then disappeared from their ken. But Ralph learned from one of the senate pages that the boss had gone to the marble room behind the Senate chamber, and had there summoned Democratic Senators one after another and had told them, in true imperial fashion, just what he wanted them to do. Ralph reported the matter to a Republican Senator and easily induced him to fulminate against this shameless display of political corruption in the opposite party. Here was the making of a racy story to which he had the exclusive right, and Ralph knew by this time how to make it. When he had finished it, Otis concocted a new lead, bristling with sarcasm, and put it on the wire under his own name. But he successfully recommended Ralph for a raise.

Despite a lack of harmony with his chief, Ralph found his life as a newspaper correspondent a pleasant one. It was made up of a daily saunter about the corridors of the Capitol and of the House and Senate Office Buildings, and of leisurely conferences with congressmen and fellow correspondents, with an hour or so of writing in the evening, followed by a late dinner at the Press Club and a session at dominoes or poker. He was on excellent terms with his chief rival, Jim Willoughby, of the *Courier* staff. They scooped each other once in a while, just for the joke, but

for the most part they observed a labour-saving treaty of mutual protection.

"What's up today, Jim?" Ralph would inquire.

"Little story over at the War Department about the New York waterfront proposition," Jim would inform him.

"Put in a black sheet for me, will you? I've got an interview with Madden I'll send you."

So the gathering of news was made easy and the writing was even easier, for most of the stories fell into a few well-known classes and the phrases in which they must be told were well-worn tools of the trade. Once in a while some unusual event, such as the passage of the tariff bill or a new excitement in Mexico, would keep them busy until late at night, but ordinarily there was little to do after eight o'clock in the evening.

Yet this was no period of stagnation for Ralph. He was always enlarging his circle of contacts and improving his manners. While not exactly observant, he was none-the-less attentive and had a gift for imitation. And he had the greatest of all assets in the cultivation of manner—a serene and equable disposition. There was in him none of the cumulative irritation which mars the surface of a personality in revolt. He liked life and smiled upon it naturally.

The loud and importunate manner which he had developed as a salesman he now looked back upon as a thing of painful crudity. Among statesmen, he perceived, a suaver and more graceful mode of intercourse prevailed and he was determined to master it. The senators and congressmen with whom he came in daily contact knew him as a polite and accommodating young man, who was perfectly willing to do a favour and who wanted to get ahead.

With Senator Thomas Jefferson Wells, one of his chief

sources of news, he struck up a useful friendship. Wells was a man of a type which only American politics could have produced. He claimed for himself a descent from the old southern aristocracy. However that may have been, he had first gladdened the public eye in a far western state as a criminal lawyer of unusual success, and especially as a jury pleader in the defence of women charged with murder. He had made more than one jury shed tears, and it was said that no client of his had ever sat in the electric chair, although many of them had richly earned the right to do so. Moving to the Middle West, he had first won a seat in Congress and later had come to the Senate by taking a nomination which no one else would have.

The appearance of Wells was a veritable triumph of art over nature, for nature had designed him to be an insignificant man. He was small, puny, bald and had a retreating chin. But he had covered his baldness with a flowing black wig, and his chin, which was happily fertile, with a luxuriant growth of whiskers. His dress was elegant and picturesque and his bearing a suave and lofty defiance to man and destiny.

Senator Wells was always making speeches, and Ralph had to get the transcript of these from the Senate stenographer and try to make them into news items. It was a trying task for the Senator's words flowed on and on, without pause and almost without meaning. In cold print this oratory seemed to be sheer echolalia, and yet as it issued from the Senator's mouth it somehow had the effect of eloquence and moved the galleries to forbidden applause.

Every little while the Senator would introduce a bill, and they were no such picayune measures as Congressman Rauschuld had devised. They were designed to affect great, sweeping reforms, and were accompanied by profound and

incomprehensible speeches. None of them ever emerged from a committee and all of them were laughed at. And yet this strange man somehow contrived to have himself taken seriously. Ralph was always recording the fact that Senator Wells had been summoned to the White House by the President or that he had been sent into some hotly contested district, where a by-election was being held, to drown the opposition under his ready deluge of words.

He appeared to regard himself even more seriously than he was regarded by others. His dignity was never relaxed for a moment. For all who might be regarded as beneath him in place, he had a manner of magnanimous condescension. And yet always there was a faint twinkle in his eyes. Did he really fool himself as he fooled others? Or was he a walking satire on politics—a superclown deliberately playing a magnificent burlesque and laughing up his sleeve? Certain it is that he could have been effectively transferred to the vaudeville stage without the slightest change of make-up or business.

Shadwell, the other Senator from his state, whom Ralph had also to visit every day, seemed at first glance to be a contrast to Wells in every way. He was long, lean and craggy-featured. He wore steel spectacles and tight pantaloons. He was always denouncing in his interviews and speeches luxury and waste and new-fangled ideas. A plain, homely, unaffected, old-fashioned man of the people —that was the way he liked to be described. And if it were added that he strongly resembled Abraham Lincoln, he was even more pleased. He admitted that he had made a special study of Lincoln's policies, and some newspaperman added that he had evidently studied Lincoln's costume as well. He would no more have had his trousers pressed than Senator Wells would have had his whiskers shaved.

Senator Shadwell was partly deaf, and getting an interview with him, about how the Democratic party squandered the people's money, was a thunderous task. Ralph would have to shout his questions across the desk and the Senator would roar back his replies. He was "good copy," for he was full of spleen and had a neat gift of phrase-making. Nor did he let his deafness work wholly as a handicap. He had an unrivalled record for attendance upon the sessions of the Senate, and sat through speeches that drove every one else to the cloak room.

Of individual members of the House Ralph had not such an intimate knowledge because there were so many of them, but he had the varieties roughly classified for working purposes. There was the vaudeville type of congressman, who wore a white vest and a long coat and a wide black hat such as are affected by train robbers and second-rate actors. These men seldom knew much about what was going on, but when an amusing and space-filling interview was needed, they were indispensable. Another well-marked variety was the ward-heeler who had been elevated to Congress by the boss as a reward for years of faithful service. Such men were valuable sources of information about political intrigue provided one could get their confidence, but they were as shy as old crows and would not be quoted. Men who had made their fortunes in business, and had purchased seats in the House by way of capping their career with public honours, constituted another distinct class.

Most important of all was the little group of men who, by long service in the House, had won the more important committee memberships, and who did nine-tenths of the work of national legislation. Most of them were lawyers who could have earned in private practice a little less than the government paid them. They were the conductors of in-

vestigations that ran for months and resulted in nothing but thick printed volumes, the wranglers over tariff schedules and items of appropriation, the authors of speeches that fill the *Congressional Record*—honest, earnest, hard-working men, for the most part, lost in the wilderness of legislative detail, eager to serve their country nobly, but determined above all to hold their hard-won jobs.

These men controlled most of the real news, and they had to be waited upon with deference. The most important of them with whom Ralph came in contact was Representative Mark. By reason of his important committee assignments, his position of leadership in his party, his knowledge of parliamentary procedure and his personal force he was said to exercise more control over legislation than any other one man in Congress. He was fond of holding long conferences with newspapermen, in which he talked to them confidentially, refusing to be quoted, and in this way he won their high regard. He was frankly contemptuous of the intelligence of most of his colleagues.

"Barker is all right," he remarked of one of his fellow members, "but he doesn't know the first thing about drafting a law."

Mark took great pride in his own high ability at drafting bills and resolutions. He was a fine legislative craftsman. In a measure from his pen every "whereas" and "provided" was in the right place, and every exigency of judicial interpretation was shrewdly foreseen. Naturally he loved to exercise his gift. He believed in laws and more laws, just as every man believes in the thing he can do.

"We don't realize how completely our happiness and security depend upon the law," he told his select audience of reporters one day. "If the legislative machinery of this country were stopped for a year, life would become a riot."

Congressman Mark envisioned human life as a flood of illicit impulse precariously held in check by a dam of law. Every little while a leak would be discovered in the dam, and Congressman Mark would deftly fashion a new law to fit the gap. Already the dam was a mountain, and still it was never adequate, it always grew.

Representative Mark inspired a measure of respect in Ralph and so did the few other men of real ability who were in Congress, but he could not understand these men or deal with them very successfully. It seemed to him that they were in a perpetual state of futile and uncomfortable revolt. Fitzgerald of New York, roaring in vain against the waste of public money, Reed of Missouri spouting reams of spleen against all sorts of absurdities, LaFollette of Wisconsin piling mountains of words in the path of the legislative machine, only to see it plough inevitably through them—such men were mysteries to him. What was their game? He assumed that they were primarily seeking personal advancement, and they certainly were winning notoriety, but it seemed to him that they had little success in capitalizing it. They were mostly poor, disgruntled and perpetually at odds with their fellows. It seemed to Ralph they missed the wisdom of the old saw that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

The Federal Association for Woman Suffrage, which inhabited a long, dark, narrow basement office on G Street, was the militant and radical wing of the army of women who were then in Washington fighting for the vote. It was frowned upon by the older, more dignified and conservative ladies of the National Woman's party. It was the Federal Association that picketed the White House with rows of pretty girls wearing the brilliant colours of the organization. Hoodlums tore down its banners. Some of its members were thrown into jail. It supplied most of the marchers for the famous suffrage parade which brought the women such a rich crop of insult and publicity.

The Federal Association, in a word, was an excellent source of newspaper copy, and it was especially valuable to Ralph because several of its most prominent members were from the Middle West. Ralph went to its offices almost every day. Once in a while he got an excellent story, and always he got a great deal of information about feminism. Most of it was given him by the executive secretary of the organization—a large, truculent-looking, freckled Irishwoman, who had an excellent mind and a fighting spirit. Time after time she proved to Ralph that woman no longer had any real occupation in the home except the bearing of an occasional baby and that the supply of babies was already far beyond the demand. She made him understand that

woman had been thwarted and imprisoned by man and that woman was in revolt. Woman demanded all work for her province. Woman demanded equal rights with man, political, economic and social. Always she ended by asserting that the cause of equal suffrage had passed the stage of propaganda. Every one with a grain of sense admitted woman's right to the vote. The time had come for legislative action and the women proposed to compel it.

Ralph would listen, bored, nodding from time to time in perfunctory agreement. His gaze would wander from the earnest passionate face of the secretary to the back part of the room where always a dozen or more women sat at a long table, illuminated by a string of shaded lights, preparing circulars and bulletins for the mail. Most of these women were not young nor pretty nor well-dressed. To an observing eye it would have been clear at a glance that most of them belonged to the great and growing class of involuntary virgins—of those women without enough charm to win in the struggle for an ever-diminishing supply of husbands worth having, without courage enough to take lovers, without strength or intelligence enough to make more than a scant living—women to whom life has denied all real fulfilment. They were the true and justified woman rebels who had rallied to the gaudy banners and the fierce war cry of the Association. They listened eagerly to the prophecy of a day when women should be free. Their deep and fearful discontent they registered as best they could by folding papers and licking stamps.

Among them frequently was one girl who stood out like a sapphire in a heap of pebbles. She was tall and slender, but with a provocative contour and a brilliant vividness of colour—abundant bright red hair, the fine fair skin that often goes with it, a large but shapely mouth. Her clothes were

all fashion and coquetry. She might have been placed there to bring out by contrast the faded drabness of the others.

Almost every time he entered the Association office, Ralph's gaze encountered her wide blue eyes—bright, expectant, challenging. He went to the place now wondering whether she would be there, instead of thinking what he would ask the secretary. Almost every day he and the red-headed girl had exchanged glances, and once or twice, faint surreptitious smiles. Across the room they had acknowledged a mutual interest. Without a word they had appointed a tryst for when opportunity should come.

2

It was during the woman suffrage convention that they at last succeeded in keeping it. Ralph went by the Association offices as usual and glanced in. The place seemed to be empty. He went to the door and looked again. With a perceptible quickening of the pulse he saw that it *was* empty—except for a slim trim figure with a fluffy red crown working all alone at the long table.

They met with broad smiles of pleasure and understanding.

"How do you do, Mr. Dolan?" she greeted. "What can I do for you and the *Herald-Inquirer?* I'm the entire office force today. Everybody else is gone to the convention . . ."

Ralph seated himself, crossed his legs, lit a cigarette, and smiled upon her with delighted self-assurance. He was flattered and pleased that she had learned his name and business.

"You might give me an exclusive interview," he suggested.

"But I don't know much," she objected. "What can I tell you?"

"Well, for a start, you might tell me who you are."

He learned that her name was Jane Belden and that in addition to being a volunteer press agent for the Association, she was an assistant society editor on one of the local papers.

When the necessary facts had been exchanged their conversation proceeded on that level of facetious inanity which always characterizes the first encounters of a flirtation. They tossed trivial words back and forth because it was customary, while their eyes were busy with a mutual scrutiny, and their minds with speculations.

He surveyed her with frank delight from her slim silken ankles to the sunburst of her hair. With special satisfaction he noted that she wore a very smart broad-cloth suit and several expensive-looking rings. He knew well that neither the newspaper nor the Association had paid for these things. "She's got money back of her," he reflected, and the evident fact increased both his interest in her and his respect for her. He was glad he had had his suit pressed the day before and that his hair had been recently cut. He felt that he looked just as smart as she did.

Presently she glanced at a little jewelled bracelet watch.

"Good gracious, it's nearly three o'clock!" she exclaimed. "I've got to go to Fort Myer and cover a polo game this afternoon."

"I hate to lose you so soon," he ventured.

"Well, if you're not too busy, why don't you come along?" she invited.

3

A tan bark arena in a great barn-like building, with boxes

and tiers of seats all around it. Many of the seats were empty but the boxes were well filled with fashionably dressed people.

Jane proved to be a most diverting directory of these notables. The gentleman before whom the players presented themselves at the beginning of the game, she explained, was the Third Assistant Secretary of War, who officially presided over the event. The handsome blond woman in the next box, she told him in a very guarded tone, was the famous Mrs. Colonel Pethwyck, who was said to have announced her intention of making her husband a general.

"And I bet she'll do it, too," said Jane. "They say she has the Secretary of War eating out of her hand. She practically dragged his wife into the society.

"See that tall woman in the corner box—the one with the gloves in her hand? That's Mrs. Judge Wardell. She's a professional débutante-starter. She got five thousand dollars last year for launching the daughter of a Wyoming cattle millionaire in Washington society. They say she got angry at his wife and simply ruined the poor little thing. . . . Introduced her to all the wrong people, you know. But I see she has some other flapper in tow this year. She gets by on her family. . . . Oh, there's Mr. Fitzhugh of the British Embassy. He's the man that said the President's wife had the manners of a washwoman. They say he was asked to resign and the British Ambassador refused to let him. It threatens to become an international episode. . . . That pretty little dark girl is the daughter of the Brazilian Ambassador. She's terribly in love with an officer in the Marine Corps. They can't marry because there isn't enough money on either side. . . . They say she's an awful simpleton, but she is cute . . . all those Latin-American women

are simply terrible. They're as proper as prunes . . . just as long as any one's looking, you know."

Ralph, although careful not to reveal the fact, was impressed and delighted. Here he was all at once moving among important and fashionable personages. If not exactly in society, he was certainly on the edge of it, with an excellent opportunity of falling in. He resolved to cultivate this girl with the utmost care and diligence. Not only was she charming, but she might be most useful as well.

"Do you go out much?" she asked him a little later.

"I haven't for the past few years," he told her. "My family out in Indiana used to go in for that sort of thing a good deal, and of course I was dragged along, but now I'm really too busy. . . ."

"But you must have some recreation. I wish you would go to some of these stupid affairs with me."

"They are stupid," Ralph agreed, with a fine affectation of boredom. "But you make them interesting. I believe I would like to go with you. Let me know when you need an escort and if I can get away from the office, I'll be delighted."

"That's awfully good of you," she said. "Dancing men are so scarce in Washington. . . . I have about five suitors that would die for me, so they say, but when I ask them to go to a ball, they remind me that they have to get up at seven o'clock in the morning."

After the game there was an informal dance. Another bond was established between the two when they discovered that they could fox-trot without stepping on each other. They said little as they danced. Each was busy with his own thoughts and observations. Jane was noticing with delight that other women's eyes followed her about the hall. She knew that they were envying her this handsome and

graceful young man she had found. She was glad that he had dark hair because she knew it set off her own bright crown and the whiteness of her skin. She liked the strength of his arm and the hard firmness of his body, and the fact that he was never nervous or flustered and did not run her into other couples.

He gave her a surreptitious little hug and she replied by squeezing his hand.

4

A couple of days later he dropped into the office of the Association and carried her off to lunch under the curious and rather disapproving eyes of the older women who had been so much impressed by his interest in feminism.

"I'm certainly glad you came," she told him. "I'm in a terrible humour and I need some one to cheer me up. I'm having one of my periodical fights with the family, and besides that, I have a visiting suitor on my hands, and he's an awful bore."

"I suppose it would be impertinent to ask what the fight is about," Ralph hazarded.

"No, not at all. It's simply that they want me to quit working and stay at home and I won't do it."

"Why do you want to work if you don't have to?" Ralph enquired. "Do you believe all that bunk they hand out at the Association about every woman having a career?"

"No," said Jane. "I don't care a snap whether I have a career or not, and I'd hate to be poor and have to work. I want to work because its fun and because it gives me a chance to get away from home. You have no idea what a nuisance it is just to stay at home and live up to your family traditions.

"You see—I come of a very old Virginia family," she

went on. She was not boasting. Her look was arch and her tone was one of mock pride. "My grandfather was a Confederate Colonel and my grandmother used to be president of the Daughters of the Confederacy. She has a place up near Leesburg—one of those mouldy relics of the old South. I have to spend a good part of every summer there pouring tea for old ladies and veterans and talking to hand-picked suitors from the very best families. About once a year the family chooses a man for me to marry. Every one of them so far has been a perfect stick. The last one was a major in the Army, forty-two years old. I liked him when I first saw him, too. He had a perfectly darling moustache. But right away he began calling me 'little girl' and kissing my hand. And when he wasn't mushy he was always explaining the Japanese menace and why we ought to invade Mexico. Then he began to get frantic and talk about his heart. He told a woman that told a friend of mine that told me that he would never be satisfied until I had borne him a son and that I was soiling my sweet young womanhood by vulgar contacts with the world. After that I canned him.

"Now they've wished another one on me. He's a sweet young boy of twenty-one, a law student at the University of Virginia and a collateral descendant of Light Horse Harry Lee. He says that with me by his side he could do anything. He's told me that seven times already. I don't see how he dopes it out. I think he must have read it in a book. Aside from that he just looks at me with his big brown earnest eyes. I kind of liked it at first, but now I have an insane desire to kick him just to see if it will change his expression. . . . Men are such sticks. They just talk and talk and never do anything except propose."

"You don't want to get married, then?" Ralph ventured.

"Oh, I guess so . . . sometime. I don't want to be an old maid. But I can marry any time. I want to have some fun first. I'm tired of being bored and doing my social duty. I want something to happen."

"Making things happen is my specialty," Ralph told her. "Just what do you want to happen?"

"Oh, I don't know," she countered lazily, looking at him through narrowed eyes. "Something exciting and lovely . . ."

"Your order is taken," Ralph assured her, going through the motions of writing in an imaginary notebook.

She threw back her head and laughed delightedly.

"You mustn't take it too seriously," she warned.

Although careful to conceal the fact from Jane, Ralph was excited, interested and not a little bewildered. She was to him a being of a new and strange variety. Women he had always divided confidently into two classes. There were nice, respectable girls in whom all natural impulses were buried deep under layers of sentimentality and affection, through which one laboriously dug his way. Making love to them was a business of flowery lies and pretences—a histrionic and incidentally a somewhat hazardous occupation, for under their innocence and rectitude these ladies concealed a ruthless yearning toward marriage. Their inevitable counterparts were the girls frankly not nice. One gave them a dinner or a few dollars. They were humble beings.

Jane was no more humble than she was self-righteous. Proud, reckless, a bit scornful, she flung him a thrilling challenge without abdicating a jot of her diginity. She was giving him a new experience. He was nothing if not adaptable. He resolved that in him she had found the man of action she was seeking.

5

Jane, in the course of her work as a society reporter, had to attend all of the large public social events, such as the charity balls, and the White House receptions and garden parties. She wrote with a loving hand long detailed descriptions of the decorations and the women's gowns. For each of these events she needed an escort, and even a pretty girl may have a hard time finding escorts in Washington. Ralph, who worked at night and who usually finished his stint about ten or eleven o'clock in the evening, was for her a lucky find. She drafted him into service by inviting him to go with her to the Southern Relief Charity Ball at the Willard Hotel.

He accepted with a fine show of casual ease and then set about solving the problem of his attire. He had worn a dress suit but twice in his life, and on both of those occasions it had been rented. Evidently, he decided, the time had come when such a costume was indispensable. By exhausting his bank account and borrowing from two friends he managed to fit himself out completely, even to a silk hat and white gloves.

6

Half an acre of women, richly-gowned, bare-shouldered, delicately scented. Behind them, seated in bunting-draped boxes, solid ranks of notables—dowagers, generals, cabinet officers, millionaires. And he was among them, for the time being he was one of them. His blood quickened and his eye brightened. He loved the rich, sensuous surfaces of fashion with a deep and greedy love. This world of sleek women and light and music seemed to him the cream of life. He felt that at last he was approaching his own.

But he was forced to realize that he was approaching it slowly. Jane introduced him to several men who came forward to greet her, but she was exceedingly chary of presenting him to women, and even noticeably steered him around several pretty girls. He functioned chiefly as an emergency partner to dance with her when no one else was at hand and to take her away from undesirable partners by breaking. He fetched her a glass of water and an ice and found a place for her to smoke a cigarette. He belonged to her by right of discovery and she used him, nor did she propose to take any unnecessary risks of losing him through feminine piracy.

He played his rather humble part gracefully and made at least one acquaintance which he rated as probably useful. He and Jane were walking across the floor together after a dance when one of the elderly women seated in a box hailed them with a gesture. She was a huge, white-haired woman, with a ruggedly homely face, wearing a gown of black satin, and a diamond necklace—a creature of impressive, barbaric ugliness. She greeted them with the proudly stupid, condescending manner of a rich old woman who knows her power. Ralph made his best bow and she threw him a look of some slight interest.

"That's old Mrs. Condell, widow of General Condell," Jane informed him as they passed on. "She makes a specialty of patronizing society reporters. She has tons of money and a perfect lemon of a daughter about thirty years old. She ropes in young men and takes them everywhere with her in droves. She has dragged all sorts of bounders into society that way, just to make her daughter seem popular. She's a crotchety old dame, but it pays to be nice to her. Old women like that practically run Washington."

Jane became steadily more attractive as the evening wore

on. Slender, agile and full of nervous energy, she was the type of woman who thrives on movement and excitement. The one brought out her grace and the other heightened her colour and brightened her eyes. While other women perspired and faded she remained cool and vivid.

Ralph danced with her as much as he could, and watched her when he was not dancing. He was in fact becoming more than a little infatuated. She fascinated him and she even awed him a little. He had always accounted himself a most successful man with women, but he had never won any such striking, high-headed creature as this. Indeed he could scarcely conceive of himself winning her. In spite of himself he looked up to her. He came of a line of climbers who had lifted themselves precariously above the soil in the past few generations. She was of a family that had known wealth and social position of a sort for centuries. They met as equals, to be sure, for both of them were young newspaper reporters making their way in the capital, but in him there was something of the conscious bounder—a feeling of uneasy eagerness covered by a carefully cultivated boldness of manner—while she had the self-assurance of an aristocrat. Both of them were faintly aware of this contrast. She condescended to him just a little and he rather overdid his air of facetious indifference in the effort to hide his fear of her.

But stronger than any other feeling between them was the keen delight they took in each other. Going home in the taxicab, she let herself lean heavily against him in the luxurious languor of weariness that dancing brings. When his arm fell about her shoulders she did not protest.

She talked lazily, glancing up at him now and then. She had a curiously provocative way of opening her eyes wide at him and then narrowing and lowering them again. She

asked him questions about his work and he replied boastfully and not too veraciously, exaggerating his experience, his salary, almost everything. He always lied about these things, as do most ambitious young men. Her comment on each of his boasts was the same.

"How perfectly w-o-o-o-nderful!" she would say, with a long sweet falling inflection on the last word. This invariable comment irritated him. It was full of honeyed politeness and yet, it seemed to him, there was just a trace of mockery in it. He wondered if she were putting him down for a four-flusher, became more conservative in his boasting, finally lapsed into silence and let her talk, while he looked down into her eyes and admired her slim shoulders under their silken scarf. He was greatly tempted to kiss her but he refrained. He did not want to risk his success by being too precipitate. He was trying to calculate carefully, and in love affairs an ounce of daring is worth a ton of calculation.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I

Jane Belden lived with her mother and her paternal grandmother in a furnished apartment on Sixteenth Street. There the three women spent the winter and in the summer they retired to the Belden estate in Virginia, where Beldens had lived and farmed for generations. Jane's grandfather had sacrificed a leg to the Confederate cause and a more remote Belden had been an officer on Washington's staff. For the rest, the Beldens had consumed much good whiskey and had slowly whittled down a great colonial landholding to a wornout Virginia farm and a few other items of real estate and capital which yielded to Jane's grandmother a comfortable income, but no more. Her father had been a lawyer of modest abilities who had died of Bright's disease in his fortieth year, trying bravely to live up to the family tradition of conviviality.

For the Beldens were all immensely proud of their family and its traditions, as are all Americans who can prove more than three generations of ancestors who have not sweated for a living. Old Mrs. Belden commanded a remarkable deference in Virginia and some social consideration in Washington, while of Jane it was said that she "had family." That, in Washington, was the next best thing to having money.

With forefathers in both of those wars which have acquired such great social importance, with a striking appear-

ance, a pretty southern accent and enough money to dress well, Jane might have gone far in a social way. Both her mother and grandmother had eagerly anticipated her social career, for nothing gives an old woman so much pleasure as the possession and management of an attractive young woman. They had planned to use Jane as a shining weapon in a social campaign of their own devising, which should end in a brilliant wedding.

Jane's resolute refusal to make a formal début and her determination to work had upset all these plans, but they had never been wholly relinquished by the grandfather. The family life of these three women was largely a struggle in which Jane strove for the freedom she craved and the two older women constantly planned to land her safely in marriage. They were sufficiently shocked by Jane's enterprise and independence, but not nearly as much so as they would have been if they could have read that young woman's daring and unsentimental mind.

On the basis of her own observation and her random researches among the literature at the suffrage headquarters, Jane had reached the bold conclusion that marriage was a speculative undertaking and apt to be a bore. She knew that she would get enough money from her grandmother to be financially independent, and she could not discover in herself the slightest inclination toward raising a family. Men, on the other hand, interested her immensely—and not one man but all men. Although cool and self-centred, she was extremely vital. It seemed to her that some arrangement which included the privileges of marriage but lacked its depressing character of a binding finality would be most desirable.

Man had always been described to her as an undisciplined animal who will do the worst that circumstance and

woman permit. To her astonishment and somewhat to her disappointment she had found that this was not in any general sense true. She was most unmistakably by descent and circumstance a "nice girl" and always her niceness sat beside her like an invisible chaperon. Men would call on her, they would take her out, they would bring her candy, flowers and books, they would hold her hand, squeeze her while dancing and kiss her in dark corners with an air of diabolical daring. A certain percentage would ultimately become serious and silent and then propose. But from this formula of courtship none of them dared to depart. She was not that kind of a girl, and they all knew it. In vain she aspired to set her dainty foot in the way of adventure. Social taboo, like an angel with a flaming sword, resolutely barred the way. For a girl of her upbringing and environment, her determination to live in her own way was a bold and original one. It marked her for a woman of courage and personality if not of good judgment. But she had so far seen no opportunity to carry it out in a manner at all satisfactory. She was like a village genius seething with a great idea but unable to find any sympathy or understanding for it.

Of course, she could have thrown herself brazenly at the head of some astonished swain, but she was far too proud for that. She wanted to be appreciated and understood, and above all, she wanted to be dominated. She craved a lover who should break through all the conventional defences and carry her away as a cherished prize. Mere pleaders she despised.

2

Ralph and Jane were together almost every day now, and their relations became steadily more difficult. The

spontaneous, childish delight in each other which had sprung from their first contacts, gave way to a tense antagonism —the hate that grows wherever love is thwarted. Clumsily he groped toward her and cleverly she eluded him, not because she wanted to so escape but because she despised his clumsiness.

Whenever he called upon her she was not alone. He spent uncomfortable evenings making laborious conversation with her rigidly impressive grandmother, her mousey, scared-looking mother. He saw her alone only in taxicabs coming home from dances and the theatre. There at last he found courage to kiss her. She always fenced him off with her head averted and a smile on her lips until they were nearly home and surrendered herself with a nice calculation so that their arrival coincided with the crisis of his ardours. She always seemed to be slipping out of his arms, with a little laugh.

He wanted her, almost intolerably, and in addition to that he wanted to humble her. He wanted to bring this proud creature to submission. And she wanted him, but she also enjoyed seeing him suffer. She enjoyed making this strong, self-assured young fellow squirm. For him to have her would be pure victory. For her it would be surrender as well as triumph. And this conflict of will, which always stands between men and women, thrives on denial. Time after time it drives the strong and the proud away from each other to seek easier satisfactions elsewhere.

She always told him good night at the door of her flat in a hushed voice. She never let him come in.

Once when they had ridden the last two blocks in each other's arms, and he was fairly intoxicated with the scent and feel of her, he pleaded:

"Let me stay a while, Jane. . . . I love you. . . . Don't make me go away. . . ."

She stood looking at him through narrowed lids with her hand on the door knob, her expression half mocking, half tender.

"'How mushy you sound!" she commented at last.

He made a desperate grab for her but she slipped through the door, laughing, and closed it in his face.

He went home cursing himself and cursing her. He was not used to being made a fool of by women. He was surprised at his own anger. He nearly hated Jane.

He had tried all of the tricks and dodges that worked with other girls. He had mentioned his flat which was such a nice secluded place, and had suggested that she might come and have a look at it sometime.

"Oh, horrors! Just imagine what a fuss the family would make if they found out I had gone to a man's apartment without a chaperon. . . . It would be the death of my grandmother . . .!"

"What your grandmother doesn't know won't kill her," he observed surlily.

But she shook her head.

"I'd love to, Ralph, and you know I would, but it simply wouldn't do."

He had also suggested canoeing on the river, but to her fastidious and somewhat snobbish spirit this seemed a vulgar suggestion.

"That's not a nice place at all," she told him. "All sorts of people go there. I should feel like the cook out with the policeman."

What in the devil, he wondered, did she want? What was her game? Maybe, in spite of all her brave words,

she was just one more girl angling for a proposal, teasing him on. She should tease him no longer.

The next time he took her home he refused to be left at the door. He put his foot in it so that she could not close it. He forced his way in. He got her in his arms, crushed her against him. She pushed him away with both hands, throwing her head back defensively.

"No! no! no! You fool!" Her voice was a hoarse, excited, whisper. Both of them seemed to have unnatural strength. They struggled for a savage moment, his lips plastered against hers, her fingers biting into the flesh of his neck and cheek. They staggered and bumped into a tall spindle-shanked hat-rack. It crashed to the floor with a noise that seemed to them like the fall of a building. There was an exclamation from an adjoining room, an astonished cough, a creak of bed springs. They jumped apart and stood staring at each other, breathing hard. With a sudden swift movement Jane switched out the hall light. A door opened ten feet away.

"Jane! For Heaven's sake! What's the matter?"

"Nothing, mother. You forgot to leave the hall light on and I ran into the hat-rack.

Ralph tip-toed to the door and let himself out like a departing burglar.

3

It was time, he perceived, for decision. Either this affair was at an end or it was not. He made a resolve and he made a plan. The resolve was not to call her up or go to see her.

He waited a worried week before he heard her voice

on the phone, but then he had his reward, for it was a conciliatory voice.

"Is that you, Ralph? Why haven't I seen you? You're not angry with me, are you?"

"No, of course not." He laughed. "What made you think that? I've been busy, that's all. By the way, if you're not engaged this evening, I'd like to make a date for you."

"A date *for* me? Who with?"

"I want to take you to call on a friend of mine."

"Who is he?"

"I won't tell you, but I'm almost sure you'll like him."

"How mysterious."

"You'll go, won't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so, if you insist."

On the way to keep this engagement she was naturally full of curiosity. She wanted to know who the man was and why Ralph was so eager for her to meet him. But he replied, smiling, only that he was sure she would enjoy meeting this friend.

When he opened the door of his flat and ushered her in, she expressed her astonishment and hung back a little.

"You must know him well," she remarked dubiously, "to go in his front door without knocking."

"Yes," he told her, as he gently pushed her across the threshold and closed the door after him. "He and I trust each other completely."

It was for him a moment of tremendous suspense. He had no idea how she would react. He never knew what women would do. In love he was a bold experimentalist.

"It's my place, Jane," he told her.

Alarm he saw in her eyes—and a sudden admiration. He drew her to him, and she did not resist.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I

The peaceful life of the *Herald-Enquirer* office was disturbed that autumn by a rumour that the paper was failing and might be sold any day. It was a paper of wide reputation in the Middle West with a circulation of more than a hundred and fifty thousand, which made it a most valuable property, and yet it was not printing enough advertising to keep it alive. Its large circulation was now a handicap. It could not make enough money to pay for the paper it used. Every night word came over the wire to cut every story to the shortest possible length. Otis would send his usual query—"Roosevelt plans return to power 1,500 words"—and the answer would come back to send six hundred words. Nothing could have been more of a blow to Otis except a proportionate cut in his allowance of liquor. It meant that his beautiful flowing phrases about the Republican party must be cruelly curtailed, and that his artistic consciousness must be further wounded by severe editing in the home office.

Moreover, the threatened loss of his job was a very serious matter to him. He was unpopular in Washington. He would get another place with difficulty, and in all probability he would never get another one as easy and dignified as this. His correspondentship was the winning of his whole career.

He now came into the office in the mornings more shaky

and irascible than ever, tore the wrapper off the newest *Herald-Enquirer* with trembling fingers and studied it with morbid eagerness. First he would look to see how his own story had been placed and edited. Upon this chiefly depended his humour for the rest of the day, and it had also a noticeable effect upon the amount of liquor he drank. Having satisfied himself about this, he would next count carefully the columns of advertising which the paper carried. He knew exactly how much it needed in order to pay expenses, and now it seldom obtained that amount. There was a slow but unmistakable decline in the space sold to advertisers, and he watched it with the helpless agony of a man who sees his blood flowing from a wound he cannot stanch.

Ralph also noticed with interest how his stories were used and the struggle of the paper to remain solvent, but the issue really meant little to him. He had long had his eyes upon another job. A minor Philadelphia paper, the *Star*, kept but a single man in Washington, and the incumbent of this position, named Haddon, was a good friend of Ralph. He contemplated leaving newspaper work to take up the practice of patent law, in which he was already engaged in a small way, and had promised to recommend Ralph for the *Star* when he abandoned it. The place paid only forty dollars a week, but it would make Ralph a full-fledged correspondent instead of an assistant and he would be in a much better position to engage in publicity work and other such ventures on his own account. He was therefore interested in his present job only to the extent of hoping it would continue to nourish him until the better place became available.

Finally news came over the wire that the *Herald-Enquirer* had been sold to a syndicate, but that no change would be

made in its Washington staff for the time being. Ralph knew it was extremely probable that such a change would be made eventually. The paper was now controlled by Catholics, and there was ample precedent for assuming that all of its more important places would be filled by men of that faith. But Otis, fatuous and self-absorbed, easily persuaded himself the new owners were so charmed by his writing that they could not bring themselves to let him out. For several days he went about full of pride and happiness and highballs, and penned glittering paragraphs about the Republican party.

It devolved upon Ralph to bring him terrible news. The *Herald-Enquirer* bureau was to be taken over by Jim Kelleher of the *Courier*—the man whom Otis hated and envied above all others. Ralph heard about it in the Press Gallery and broke it to Otis the next morning as the latter was ripping open the paper to see how his latest offering had fared.

"Jim Kelleher!"

The paper fell from his hands. A curious change came over his face. His jaw dropped and his eyes widened into a look of helpless distress. The mask of irony and resentment through which he faced the world seemed all at once to dissolve, and there looked forth a simple passionate being, such as artists and children are—frustrate, bewildered, hurt. Then his features twisted in a sharp agony.

"By God!" he exclaimed, with a half sob in his voice. "That little —— — —— can't write worth a damn!"

2

Comparatively few men in this country enter newspaper work with the deliberate intention of making it their permanent occupation. The ambitious young American nearly

always dreams of a sudden leap toward fame or fortune, and he usually thinks of a fortunate personal contact as the means to this, rather than hard and patient work. He has little faith in either skill or knowledge. He believes that the differences among men are chiefly differences of circumstance or luck. His early efforts are a search for opportunity rather than a struggle to learn.

The allure of newspaper work lies in the fact that it requires no preliminary training, and offers quick and easy advancement to a certain point. There are two easily distinguishable types who enter it, expecting to leap from that point to a foothold in some other occupation. One of these is the ambitious young adventurer who uses the newspapers as a way to useful acquaintances and information, and eventually graduates into politics or business by way of a job as press agent or secretary. The other type is a man with an aptitude for words and an aspiration toward one of the literary arts. These fare much harder. A few of them, by terrible toil, do evolve into novelists or playwrights, but most of them slowly lose sight of the dream that drove them toward the press. Writing becomes to them a drudgery instead of a delight. The fine intellectual freedom and detachment, which are of the essence of the creative mood, they sacrifice to the service of other men's purposes. The good newspaperman is one who thinks no thought of his own, but takes up another's idea as blotting paper takes up ink. Hence the newspaper game is full of frustrate personalities,—of men who have ancient manuscripts in the bottoms of trunks and brave dreams never quite abandoned in the depths of their minds. They are cynical men and most of them get drunk about once a week.

Such a one Ralph had encountered in Otis, and now he found himself for a time associated with his direct antithe-

sis. James Kelleher was to choose his own assistants, and having no one else in sight he allowed Ralph to remain in the bureau for the time being, with a hint that if he was zealous he might make a permanent place for himself.

Kelleher was a dapper, handsome little man in his later thirties. His face was smooth as that of a baby, he wore an almost perpetual grin revealing a fine set of teeth, and his bright blue eyes were always a-twinkle. Ralph had assessed him as a most amiable and kindly man. Gradually he came to realize that the twinkle in his eyes was as hard as the glitter of a blade.

The *Herald-Enquirer* now underwent one radical and immediate change of policy, and that was in its attitude toward Roosevelt. For Kelleher was one of those strangely various beings known as "Roosevelt men." He had been a reporter making thirty-five dollars a week when Roosevelt took the presidential chair. Somehow he had managed to catch the great man's eye and to win his confidence. He had come to be known as the only Washington newspaperman who could call the White House at night on the telephone and reach the President's ear. Speedily he had risen, on the strength of this favour, to be the head of one of the largest Washington news bureaus at a salary of ten thousand a year. He was known to have been offered an ambassadorial post and to have refused it. What he craved was a position of social importance in Washington. During the last few weeks of the Roosevelt administration the place of Fifth Assistant Secretary of War had become vacant and Roosevelt had given it to him. He had held it till the end of the Roosevelt administration and during about three days of that of President Taft—a total of somewhat less than a month. But during this time he had managed to get his name inserted in "Who's Who in America," and his portrait in oil

hung on the walls of the secretarial office, along with those of all the other incumbents, which is about as much as any Fifth Assistant Secretary of War has ever achieved.

Although out of office, Roosevelt was of course still a power and Kelleher still throve on his favour. His new job on the *Herald-Enquirer* had been given him largely because it was to be a pro-Roosevelt paper under its new management.

Ralph was in the office when Kelleher installed himself and so were some other newspapermen and politicians. Kelleher had a secretary—a boy of seventeen whom he paid ten dollars a week,—and this lad was unpacking the new incumbent's journalistic effects. Presently he held up a great bale of yellow paper.

"Here are the Roosevelt telegrams, Mr. Kelleher," he announced. "What shall I do with them?"

The Roosevelt telegrams were reverently installed in a safe, even as the faithful cherished the bits of bone and rock upon which Mohammed wrote his wisdom. Then the Roosevelt letters were brought forth and deposited with a like ostentation, and finally the Roosevelt autographed portrait was hung upon the wall as a revered image is placed in a shrine.

Ralph gradually came to perceive that Kelleher was, insofar as Nature would permit, a small imitation Roosevelt. His grin was the Roosevelt grin, made the more realistic by the fact that he shared the Roosevelt endowment of large and gleaming teeth. He had cultivated the aggressive and overwhelming Roosevelt handshake, and the Rooseveltian use of explosive but not profane epithet.

Ralph had no objection to these harmless affectations, but he found it hard to sympathize with Kelleher's enthusiasm

for the Rooseveltian doctrine of the strenuous life. Kelleher felt that it was necessary for him to present the world with a spectacle of tireless activity. Upon his molehill of a job he erected a mountain of effort. If an interview on a certain matter was required, he interviewed not one Senator but seven or eight of them. If a committee report was scheduled to be issued on a certain day, he spent the week previous trying to get an advance idea of what was in it. He was always inviting Senators and Congressmen to luncheon and dinner and trying to extract from them bits of exclusive information. He could not write well and frankly admitted the fact, nor had he any ideas except those of Roosevelt, but as a news-hunter he was without a rival. He scored a beat about every other day. He kept the wire hot with excited queries. He was always on the trail of some great scandal or disclosure that was to shake the nation. Somehow the nation remained for the most part unshaken, but Kelleher made his newspaper interesting.

Every administration brings forth in Washington a few newspaper mushrooms such as Kelleher, who make reputations and sometimes fortunes out of the favour of a President, of a President's secretary, or even of an influential Cabinet officer. Often these opportunists disappear with their patrons, but if one is shrewd he may dig himself in so deep that he will survive several hostile administrations.

Ralph understood and admired Kelleher's shrewd opportunism. He, too, would have liked a chance to tie himself to the coattails of greatness, but he would have done it coolly, with a perfect, smiling hypocrisy. He had no capacity for hero worship. Kelleher's slavish imitative devotion to Roosevelt, his dog-like sincerity, disgusted Ralph. And the worst of it was that Kelleher plainly expected him to

share it. He expected Ralph to embrace the strenuous life and labour mightily for the glory of Roosevelt. Nothing could have been more repugnant to Ralph.

The relation of the two became a struggle, Kelleher trying desperately to make Ralph work hard, and Ralph resisting with a cool impudent confidence which was grounded in the knowledge that he had a better job in sight. Kelleher was always assigning him heavy tasks which Ralph would slight, ignore or find it impossible to do.

The more he reneged, the more Kelleher sought to lay upon him. Once he set Ralph to take a poll of the Senate on some important question. This was frequently done by the newspapers, but usually several men were employed for the task. Ralph polled three Senators and reported that he had been kept waiting so long by these that he could not get around to the others. On a Sunday afternoon, when usually little was done, Kelleher sent him to interview four Cabinet officers on the state of the nation. He interviewed the Secretary of Agriculture, who predicted bumper crops and great prosperity among the farmers, and let it go at that. The others were not accessible, he reported. He was bland and plausible about all of his excuses and failures. This was especially irritating to Kelleher. He was determined at least to break down the smiling imperturbability with which his young assistant always confronted him.

His opportunity came about nine o'clock one hot night when the home office sent an order for a story as to how the Senate Ways and Means Committee stood on a certain measure. Such a query was usually answered by persuading the chairman or one influential member of the committee to say something, and by piecing out the story with guesswork and bluff. But Kelleher set Ralph to hunting out the members of the committee by telephone. He called the

chairman at his home, his office, his down-town club, and finally located him at his country club. The chairman said a few perfunctory words, and Ralph thought he had done. But Kelleher set him upon another man, who was found only after five phone calls, and then upon a third. It was a hot, nerve-wracking task, which promised to last a good part of the night and was wholly futile, for none of the members would say anything of value. Ralph perceived that he was being deliberately heckled. He saw on Kelleher's face a satisfied grin, such as a school bully wears when he has a smaller boy down and is making him yell. When he had made about a dozen phone calls, and the third committeeman had cursed him for disturbing his rest, he rose and took his hat.

"Where are you going?" Kelleher demanded, "I want you to get the whole committee."

"I'm quitting," Ralph explained with a pleasant smile. "I go to work for the Philadelphia *Star* next week."

He stood for a moment enjoying the look of frustration and surprise on Kelleher's face, then spoke a polite farewell and went out.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I

It proved to be lucky for Ralph that he had a new place ready to receive him, for soon after he parted with Kelleher war broke out in Europe. There followed that curious period of apathy and hard times, before the boom in munitions came to the rescue of American industry and before the newspaper campaign for hatred and preparedness got well under way. This was an especially lean period for newspapermen, great numbers of them being thrown out of work as staffs were reduced. Ralph was the entire Washington staff of his newspaper, and in the circumstances he spared no pains to make himself an efficient one.

As an assistant on the *Herald-Enquirer* his regular round had been confined to the Capitol and he had visited the White House and the various departments only occasionally. Now he was compelled to go to the White House every day and to the Treasury and the War, State and Navy buildings almost as often.

The White House interested him especially, for he knew that more newspaper fortunes are made through favour there than anywhere else.

At the White House, as at the more important Departments, there is a Press Room where the newspapermen may loaf, write if they please, and keep in touch with their offices by telephone. A dozen or more correspondents are usually to be found there, waiting for a statement to be

issued, a Cabinet meeting to end, or for some important visitor to emerge from the presidential stronghold. It has the characteristic atmosphere of places where newspapermen congregate—an atmosphere of scattered paper, tobacco smoke, gossip and of leisurely good-nature. It appears to be an idle gathering of friendly young men who have met for no more serious purpose than to tell stories and smoke. But these seemingly idle fellows are really intent on business. An important statement is issued from the secretary's office. Suddenly telephones are busy, men are off for their offices. A senator emerges from a conference with the President. He is almost mobbed by newspapermen who fight for his attention, each hoping to get an answer to some question of special interest to his own paper, or to catch a significant word which his rivals have missed. They hang to the man like wolves to a quarry until he escapes into a cab.

Once a week the President receives the newspapermen and exposes himself to a bombardment of questions. Scores of correspondents are on hand for this event. They are admitted to the executive office at a stated moment, and the great man receives them standing defensively behind his desk. He perhaps makes some announcement of fact or policy and then the questioning begins. Any man may ask any question, and the President necessarily must evade most of them. His success as a President depends in no small measure upon the grace and good-nature with which he manages this difficult matter, for a President, no less than the pettiest congressman, is dependent upon the press for his political existence. He succeeds best if he can meet them on what appears to be a plane of good fellowship, affecting to take them into his confidence and to put them on their honour as to what shall be written and what kept

secret. If he tries to dictate to them or to patronize them he is digging for himself a deep political grave, as some Presidents have discovered. Of all the varieties of men who live by words, the newspaper reporter has the least intellectual independence. He may express almost anything except himself. And yet he can find a hundred ways to punish an enemy or to cherish a friend.

Underneath the alert quest for news at the White House runs a less obvious but more intense current of effort and competition—the struggle for the favour of the great man, and of those who have his ear—the struggle which produces such ephemera as Kelleher.

This administration lent itself especially well to the success of such adroit fellows. The President was an inaccessible man, but he was one who had a great appreciation of loyalty, by which he meant a complete and uncritical acceptance of his ideas and purposes. Moreover, he trusted completely in his secretary and the secretary was even more fatuous than the chief. He had been a minor ward politician most of his life and he showed the curious mixture of simplicity and cunning which often characterizes such men. He was honest, loyal and good-natured, but exceedingly susceptible to flattery. While affecting the greatest admiration for his patron, he believed, and ultimately let it be known, that he was the creator of the President's success. He was able to show that in each crucial situation his advice had made for success, and that the President had failed only when his secretary was not by his side.

Naturally this man was very amiable toward those who showed an appreciation of the great part he was obscurely playing in national and international affairs. Ralph was not slow to see the advantage of gaining his favour and the method by which it might be done. He had become an ha-

bitué of the executive offices somewhat late in the administration, but he nevertheless got so far as calling the secretary by his first name, and he was always on the alert for a method of capitalizing this advantage.

2

Presently his work forced him to push still farther into the tangled wilderness of government. His paper published a weekly page devoted to a strange subject known as "popular science" and to feed it he had to visit such unknown regions as the Bureau of Plant Industry, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and the Bureau of American Ethnology. He was amazed to find that the government had tucked away somewhere an earnest underpaid authority on almost any branch of science he could investigate. He tracked to cubby-holes at the ends of long corridors men who had devoted their lives to such subjects as the insect parasites of the tobacco plant, terrestrial magnetism, paleontology, and the myths and legends of the Navajos. Solemn, self-absorbed men they generally were, looking upon the invading reporter with suspicion and surprise, as the Eskimos looked upon the first explorers of the Far North. Often it took all of Ralph's diplomacy and ingenuity to make them talk, but when started they overwhelmed him with technical language and erudite enthusiasm.

Veritable monomaniacs they appeared to him, each seeing in his own specialty the salvation of the world. In the Biological Survey he found a fellow who had spent twenty years studying the food habits of birds. He had examined the stomachs of some thousands of hawks and owls. Finding a pair of owls in one of the towers of the Smithsonian building, he had climbed to their nest with a ladder every day for months and had made a careful examination of

the pellets of bone, feather and fur which the owls disgorged after every meal. He had proved conclusively that owls kill rats and mice and that the future of the world's food supply depended in no small measure on a recognition of this fact. Hawks and owls were being indiscriminately murdered. They were man's best friends.

He was at once so eloquent and so statistical on the subject that Ralph was wholly convinced and wrote a brilliant piece in which he held up the common screech owl as a leading benefactor of the human race.

But the next man he interviewed was an etymologist, and an authority of world renown upon the habits of the bluebottle fly. This savant made Ralph understand that life has resolved itself into a bitter struggle between man and the insects with the insects getting the best of it. He perceived that the mosquito kills its millions and the hessian fly takes bread from the mouths of the poor. He envisioned a future world in which a few last survivors of the human race would scamper about the earth pursued by vast clouds of conquering insects. Finally this man informed him that he had discovered the solution of the insect problem. It was for man to eat the insects. All of them were nourishing and many of them were palatable. He himself had once made a thick soup of green caterpillars, properly seasoned, and had eaten it with real enjoyment and no deleterious effects. Ralph obtained all of the details about this soup, including the recipe, and went away so rejoiced at the fine feature story he had discovered that he did not care if he *was* a mere decadent mammal besieged for his life by bugs.

In the same way, a man at the Bureau of Standards presented him with a view of life as a purely mechanical problem, which science was rapidly solving. All that science needed in order to conquer the earth was adequate financial

support. The sun and the waves could be harnessed to machines and multitudes could be fed from the unplumbed depths of the sea. The humour of Mark Twain and the drama of Shakespeare, this man solemnly assured him, could be expressed in formulæ and produced by machinery. In the millennium of which he dreamed human personality would be superfluous. Man, the lord of creation, would stand with an oil can in one hand and a formula in the other amid a vast roar of omnipotent machinery.

Ralph believed everything these men told him, provided he could understand it, but happily he forgot as easily as he believed. His mind had no capacity for ideas. He heard of these wonders as a child hears fairy tales, and he wrote them like fairy tales. He found everything both funny and wonderful. His feature stories were simple, facetious, exaggerated and invariably incorrect as to technical details. They always made the scientists angry and they always pleased the readers of his newspaper. They added considerably to his reputation and his income.

3

Far more remunerative than his mere reporting was the work he did that winter as a press agent. For such undertakings he was now most advantageously placed because he had no superior in his own office. There was no one to criticize his activities or to edit his copy. He could accept whatever engagements he could find time for and he could use his own paper as a medium for propaganda provided he did it adroitly and discreetly. As he understood well, it is only in this way that newspaper work may be made really profitable. Comparatively little money is paid by newspapers for the words they print, but large sums are annually disbursed by persons who want certain things

printed. Some of it is disbursed openly, but a great deal of it changes hands in secret. Into this plump and hidden pie Ralph was resolved to get his fingers.

His first opportunity was afforded him unexpectedly by a member of the Pennsylvania delegation in Congress. The by-election of that year brought to the House a young Democratic Congressman named Hiram Peters Udell. Like a good many other congressman at that time he had won his place by taking a Democratic nomination in a heavily Republican district which unexpectedly went Democratic by reason of the great prestige which the Democratic administration then enjoyed.

Udell was only thirty-two years old. His long blond hair was brushed back in a fine oratorical wave from his high and bulging brow and he looked upon the world earnestly with wide blue eyes through thick glasses. He was obviously not encumbered by a sense of humour, which is so often a handicap in a political career. His every word and gesture proclaimed that he was intensely conscious of himself as a gifted young man taking the first momentous step in his political career. He had a modest fortune which he had inherited.

Ralph was interested as soon as he heard this latter detail and when he saw Udell he was still more interested. As a salesman he had taken pride in his ability to pick out at a glance the type of man who can most easily be "sold." Ralph felt sure that he could have sold this man stock in a silver mine or an encyclopedia had he been dealing in either. Since he had no tangible commodity to offer, he was resolved to sell Udell a large chunk of expensive publicity.

As a correspondent for a Pennsylvania newspaper it was a part of his work to keep in touch with the new Congressman. Ordinarily he would have looked in on the man about

once in two weeks to see if he had achieved the appointment of a postmaster or received a petition from his fellow citizens. Feeling as he did a personal interest in Udell, he went to his office almost every day, and the Congressman, who had an entirely adequate conception of his own importance, saw nothing unusual in this. Moreover, the young man was lonely in his office on the fourth floor of the House Office Building, which was like a cell in huge honeycomb where he had been deposited and forgotten with no one to bear him company but a homely stenographer selected by his wife.

He and Ralph talked over all the great questions of the day, the Congressman explaining to Ralph his exact position upon all of them. The two found themselves in agreement upon nearly everything, and Udell naturally formed a high opinion of Ralph's intelligence. In time he became confidential. He admitted to Ralph that he was disappointed in his congressional career. He felt that he was not getting himself and his views before either the House or the people. In his home county he had played a rather prominent part. Here in Washington he had done little—nothing in fact except answer a few letters and attend to some details of patronage. He had made one speech five minutes long upon the floor of the House, and nearly all of his fellow legislators had adjourned to the cloak room at the time. He had extended his remarks in the *Congressional Record* to some eleven thousand words, but he found that the *Record* was very inadequately noticed both by the press and by the people. In fine, he felt that he had not found any sufficient expression for the message of independence and progress which he had within him, and which had impelled him to sacrifice his personal interests and enter the service of his country.

Ralph nodded in grave understanding.

"It's a problem in publicity," he told Udell. "In such a large and noisy aggregation as the House no man can get much attention without it. You've got to make your name familiar to the people. . . ."

"But how do you go about it?" Udell wanted to know.

"Well, there are publicity bureaus here in Washington that will do the work on contract after a fashion, but of course they can't make a detailed study of your needs," Ralph explained. "A personal press agent who understands your policies and connections is better, but of course more expensive."

The Congressman was a little slow of thought, but after several conversations along this line it did occur to him that he would be most fortunate if he could obtain Ralph's assistance in this matter, and he suggested as much. This was just what Ralph wanted. He always made the other man take the initiative if possible.

"I'm pretty well tied up right now," he told the Congressman, "but I might be able to do some work for you on the side a little later. Being a correspondent for a Pennsylvania paper and knowing all of the other Pennsylvania newspapermen, I could perhaps be of more use to you than the average press agent. Then, too, I have a very large acquaintance in the Press Club. The influence of the Press Club is almost indispensable to a man who expects to get ahead in politics. I must take you up there soon."

Ralph kept this promise by taking the Congressman to lunch at the Club, introducing him to scores of newspapermen, and putting him up for an associate membership. The Congressman was duly impressed. A little later the Press Club held an entertainment of a kind which is usually given after each congressional election, known as "Baby Congressmans' Night." New members of the House are placed

one by one upon a rostrum before the assembled correspondents and allowed to make themselves just as ridiculous as they please. Udell was the triumph of the show. He appeared in a Prince Albert coat, and displayed an amusing propensity to insert two fingers just above the second button from the top. The other two victims of the occasion struck a facetious vein, one of them doing a very creditable burlesque of congressional oratory. But Udell, burdened with heavy thoughts and having for the first time since his arrival in Washington a chance to speak them, was in no mood for foolishness. He produced a large wad of notes, pushed back his wave of blond hair, and gave his audience a spirited review of all the major questions of the day, national and international, with many an impressive pause and much hammering of the left palm with the right fist. The grinning newspapermen applauded him with enthusiasm.

The next day Ralph made a contract with Udell in which he agreed to attend to matters of publicity for the Congressman during that term of Congress for twenty-five hundred dollars, it being understood, of course, that this engagement was not to interfere with his other work.

When the contract was signed Ralph felt that his work with Congressman Udell was almost done. He had no intention of squandering much time or energy upon the man, but neither did he intend to let him feel slighted. He continued to drop into the Congressman's office frequently. Whenever Udell had a small item about patronage, he put it in his own paper and gave copies to all of the other Pennsylvania correspondents. The Congressman had an idea for a constitutional amendment, which he considered to be of the first importance. He felt it was a mistake that an administration elected in November should not take

office until the following March, and he wanted to introduce a constitutional amendment to remedy this defect in the machinery of government. It is an ancient defect which has been noticed a thousand times, but it will always do to write about. Newspapermen recognize it as one of the perennial ideas. Ralph wrote it up once more in the form of an interview with Udell, greatly to the gratification of the young Congressman. He also gave the latter a great deal of good advice as to how to get what he wanted in the Departments, how to approach various committee chairmen and other persons of power. He was shrewd and experienced while Udell was both stupid and green. He probably gave the Congressman good value for his money without in the least intending to do so.

4

During this same dull period, Ralph fattened his income by many other publicity contracts of a similar sort. Once he had applied himself thoroughly to the matter, and had made a bit of reputation for his skill and discretion, he was amazed at the number and variety of persons who were willing to pay their way into the newspapers. The wealthy wife of an Army colonel rewarded him well to promote her husband's campaign for a generalship by keeping his name in the papers. A bank retained him as a press agent in its fight against an official of the Treasury Department who was too inquisitive about banking methods. An organization for the reform of ex-convicts employed him to conduct a money-raising campaign on a percentage basis. He found it easy to take on as much work of this sort as he could do. Wholly devoid of any binding convictions or ideas of his own, he learned how to work up enthusiasm for any cause on a few hours' notice. He was an ideal Hessian of the press.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I

One day in the early part of 1915 Ralph had to go to the Library of Congress in search of some statistics his newspaper wanted. It was an errand for which he had little taste. The huge, high-domed reading room with its circular ranks of tables about a great central desk and its soft-footed, whispering attendants reminded him of a church or of a school—two things he associated with all dulness and boredom. He much disliked all quiet places and he also disliked solitude. He did not despise his own company as do most humans, who become depressed and uneasy if left alone and idle for any length of time, but he had little autonomous mental life. It took the stimulus of human contact to make him function. Left alone, unless he had some practical matter to think about, he would presently relapse into a state of complacent vacuity and then go to sleep.

So, having put in orders for what he wanted he sat impatiently waiting, wholly uninterested in the library and its contents. The wisdom of the world was piled up all around him, and he gave it not a thought. Like a wild animal he had all the wisdom he needed or could possibly use. Hence intellectual curiosity was not in him. But he did look with interest at the few other occupants of the reading room. One of the attendants was a pretty girl in a green dress and his eye followed her with lazy pleasure until she disappeared into the stacks. He took note amusedly of a

negro receiving great piles of books with conscious pride in his ability to command so much attention and service, of a professorial-looking person almost concealed behind a tower of volumes with a reading lamp shedding a ghastly greenish glow upon his bald head, and of two high school girls giggling guiltily over some treasure of forbidden wisdom.

Then he noticed a man in a corner with a few books before him, writing industriously, and after a few minutes of scrutiny he recognized Henry Lambert. He had not seen Henry nor thought of him for some months, but the sight of him immediately stirred the impulse of warm, uncomprehending friendliness which Henry had always inspired. He hurried over and laid a hand on his friend's shoulder. Henry jumped like a criminal fearing arrest, and then smiled wearily as he recognized Ralph. He was looking his worst—pale, haggard and nervous.

"Where in the name of God have you been keeping yourself?" Ralph enquired, as the two shook hands. "I haven't seen you in months."

"It would be an exaggeration to say I've been keeping myself at all," Henry replied with his usual uncompromising frankness, "I got canned six months ago when the bottom fell out of things, and ever since then I've been making about two-thirds of a living by doing all sorts of dirty work."

"What kind of dirty work do you mean?" Ralph enquired.

"Almost everything short of larceny and murder," Henry told him. "Chiefly feature stories and magazine stuff and even movie scenarios about the war. I don't know anything about the war, and I don't feel the slightest interest in it, but it's war stuff or nothing now. . . ."

"Well, I don't see anything so terrible about that," Ralph

interposed, "If you're getting by with the stuff."

"I'm not getting by with most of it," Henry explained. "That's the worst of it. I'm writing rot in agony of soul and not making as much as a plumber's assistant."

Ralph snorted in disgust. Henry's attitude toward his situation struck him as little better than imbecilical. It had always seemed to him that any man who could not make a living must suffer from some mental defect. For his own part he found it childishly easy to take money away from others. And Henry's case was the more peculiar because he had undeniable gifts. His command of language was nothing less than wonderful and language was the tool with which money was most easily pried loose from the places where it lodged. But Henry seemed wholly unable to perceive the most obvious opportunities or to improve them when he did see them. He appeared to be handicapped by a sort of idiotic fastidiousness. That, at least, was all Ralph could see in Henry's idealism. For although a man may by patient effort comprehend what is smaller and meaner than himself, he can by no means grasp what transcends him. He imputes his own motives to others and in his imagination drags every one down to his own level. So to Ralph, Henry was primarily a bright youth who had not common sense enough to take care of himself. He felt for his friend a mixture of admiration and contempt. The dreams of beauty that haunted and tortured Henry's imagination, his passionate, frustrate groping toward an unattainable vision, the writhing agony of his contact with things as they are—all the gorgeous poignant tumult of a young idealist in his first furious clash with reality—were inconceivable to Ralph. He only knew that some strange ferment worked in the brain of his friend and brought forth amusing torrents of words. He loved to hear Henry talk.

And he saw that Henry was now under an urgent need of utterance. He resolved to prime him with a drink, pump him a little, and see what would come out. Also and incidentally he wanted to help Henry if he could.

"Let's get out of here," he suggested, "And go where we can talk."

2

Henry agreed and the two settled themselves in the dark, deserted basement bar of a hotel across the street from the House Office Building. Henry eagerly gulped a couple of highballs.

"I never take a drink nowadays unless somebody buys it for me," he explained. "If I did I'd be drunk and broke all the time."

"I don't see why you should be so broke," Ralph observed with his characteristic delicacy. "I thought you said your wife's folks had a whole pot of money."

"So they have," Henry admitted, "And they use it to insult me. My father-in-law has paid my rent for the last three months, and I'd just as soon have him spit in my eye as do it again the same way."

Henry's highballs had gone to his head. He talked with passionate abandon.

"The old man never did like me," he went on. "He's a wholesale grocery dealer and he regards a writer as a sort of minor criminal. About two months after I lost my job I published a sonnet and got six dollars for it, and when he heard about that he was mad as hell. He said I was squandering my time writing verse for next to nothing when I couldn't even keep a roof over my wife's head. He hasn't got the decency to offer me a loan. He gives money to Alice in driblets. I've seen the time when I had to borrow

a dime from my wife to buy a smoke so I wouldn't go crazy. A man doesn't get any lower than that."

Henry swallowed another drink and mopped a beady crop of perspiration off his brow.

"Being married is bad and being broke is bad, but being married and broke at the same time is simply hell," he opined. "I don't know how I would have stood it except for the library. That's where I spend most of my time. I dig up dope about submarines and frightfulness until I can't stand it any longer and then I get a big pile of books I like—poetry and stuff like that—and wander in it a while and forget I'm alive. Sometimes a real idea bubbles up through the junk that cumbers my mind and I scribble and really enjoy myself. And it's quiet and peaceful in there."

"It's quiet and peaceful all right," Ralph agreed. "I'd as soon spend my time in a graveyard."

"A graveyard isn't so bad either," Henry observed. "A large part of the human race is much easier to stand dead than alive. I might have a proper reverence for my father-in-law if he were dead. Maybe that's why I feel like shooting him."

"Henry, you're drunk," Ralph commented. "But how did you get yourself canned out of the *Sun* office? You were the best man they had down there."

"Sure I was," Henry modestly agreed. "That's why they canned me. The managing editor didn't like me. He said I was trying to run the paper and write editorials into the news columns. He claimed my dramatic reviews were losing advertising for the paper. When it came to cutting down the staff I was the first amputation . . . I tell you, Ralph, there's no place for a man with a brain in the general run of life. It's a big bunch of boneheads playing a stupid game among themselves, and an intelligent man is

simply an intruder. The only way he can win is by being a master of dissimulation. He's got to beat them at their own game and play his game at the same time. Finally he may get so strong that they're afraid of him, but generally he goes under. . . ."

Ralph, like most unreflective persons, was always uncomfortable in the presence of a generalization. He interrupted to bring the conversation back to the practical.

"What are your plans?" he wanted to know. "Have you got anything in sight? I can lend you a couple of hundred if you want it."

But Henry held up his hand in a gesture of prompt refusal.

"If I began borrowing I'd soon be mortgaged for life," he said. "Any animal that can't survive on its own energy is bound to perish in the long run anyhow. There's no use in postponing the event. I'm going to make some money or bust. For the past four years, since I left college, I've been making a living with about one-eighth of my brain. The rest of it has been straying in all sorts of directions—fiction and drama and poetry that never sell, and dreams and ideas that never even go down on paper. The intellectual energy I've spent trying to figure out man's place in the universe would have made me a fortune if I had hitched it to some productive undertaking. I'm whipping my faculties into line. I hold them to the job of money-making as long as I can, and then I let them run a little while in their natural directions. It's a problem in self-discipline. I believe I can convert myself into a good practical money-making-machine, thereby robbing the world of a philosopher and poet which it doesn't want anyhow."

"That's the best idea you ever had, Henry," Ralph told him. "But just how are you going to make this money?"

"Well, I've got a little publicity job," Henry told him. "I work for the National Defence Association. The job doesn't amount to much yet, but I believe it will grow. The powers that rule us are determined to get us into this war and it will take a lot of propaganda to do it. I expect to get fat purveying the same. It's a low business, partaking of both murder and theft, but it's going to be done anyway and I might as well get part of the boodle. It would be more decent and direct and more socially useful to shoot a banker and rob a till, but the time has passed when a man can either rob or kill in that simple old-fashioned way our forefathers used. Crime has become a sedentary occupation for all save an insignificant few who live in jail. . . ."

"Henry, you've got the craziest ideas I ever listened to," Ralph observed, shaking his head in a gesture of deprecation. "But I do hope you have luck with this publicity stuff. You're right when you say it's going to grow."

The friends presently shook hands and parted to go back to their tasks. Ralph was more than ever convinced that Henry had no sense and suspected that he was perhaps a little unbalanced to boot, but that made no difference in his feeling for the man. If Henry had actually robbed a bank he would have stood by him just the same.

"Remember, Henry, if you get right up against it, you can count on me for help," was his parting word.

"Thanks," Henry replied. "But I won't need it. This is where I pull through under my own power or go down for keeps."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I

For a while Jane Belden had given Ralph a most flattering devotion. All of that autumn and winter they had played delightfully at love. They had gone together to all of the public dances and receptions to which Jane had tickets and they had seen all of the best plays offered in the Washington theatres. At other times they would go to his apartment with the most elaborate clandestine precautions, never entering or leaving the place together. Jane took a fine pagan delight in the whole affair.

"I think it's lovely to be devilish," she told Ralph. And she was at first highly appreciative of him as the instrument of her devilishness. She had longed to be conquered, he had conquered her, and she was deeply grateful to him. Her wide blue eyes rested upon him with a real tenderness, and she now proclaimed all of his deeds and words perfectly wonderful without the slightest trace of mockery in her voice. She had grown more beautiful, too, acquiring a new softness and bloom. Ralph was exceedingly proud of her, bearing her haughtily on his arm in crowded places, noting with pleasure the eyes that followed them. She was a splendid trophy. He wished that all the world might know she loved him. And she held his interest and respect as no woman had done before. In her was nothing of the tearful, clinging, pleading quality to which he had been accustomed in women. She showed no jealousy toward him, and did not allow him to criticize her own asso-

ciations. He knew that if he turned away from her she would make no effort to call him back. She made him feel that he had never wholly won her, that his hold upon her was slight. And that indeed was true.

Jane never went to the offices of the Federal Association any more. Her interest in woman suffrage seemed to have vanished. She still acted as a society reporter, largely because it gave her a certain freedom from the supervision of her family.

But her intellectual cravings had not been completely obliterated by love, as often happens in the case of women. She was of a catlike nature, loving caresses, yet always detached, fastidious and self-contained. She was not one who could devote herself wholly either to a man or to a child. Love was necessary to her, but it stimulated rather than absorbed her, so that she sought inevitably some other outlet for her energies. Such is the nature of many of those women who devote themselves a little to the arts and a good deal more to the artists.

To hold her a man must dominate her mind, and Ralph was not equal to that achievement. The very emotion he had awakened was pulling her away from him, for it had stimulated her thought and fancy and this quickened mental life he could not share. As the mild madness of a first infatuation wore away he came inevitably to seem more and more stupid to her. He talked of little but politics and money. His taste in music was ragtime and literature to him consisted of the daily papers and of a few popular magazines.

Jane had not been much his superior in taste and sophistication when first they met. She had read a great deal more than he, but chiefly in the magazines and in novels of a sentimental sort. Her occasional excursions into the clas-

sics, like those of most young and imaginative women, had been inspired more by an erotic than by an intellectual craving. She had read with wide-eyed secret delight the familiar red-backed edition of Balzac's "Droll Stories," the Decameron, Maupassant's "Bel Ami," Rousseau's Confessions and various other of the racy foreign works which are sold in every American book store as the necessary complement of a conventional and bloodless native literature. One such volume had nearly always been hidden under her pillow or buried in the fragrant confusion of her bureau drawer, to be taken out at night and perused with much skipping.

Yet these researches had served in a measure to form her taste. After reading half a dozen French classics, Mrs. Barclay and Robert W. Chambers could not satisfy her. They were as oat-meal to a palate accustomed to red meat.

Now she had lived the emotions which before she had sought in books. She had found them different from her dream and yet not unacceptable. No longer craving the erotic in literature merely for its own sake, she began to seek for books that possessed some reality and power and were at the same time more relevant to life as she knew it than the classics of another generation. She discovered H. G. Wells and read with an entirely new delight his long series of fictional tracts for rebellious youth. George Moore and Galsworthy and other contemporary Englishmen were also thrilling discoveries.

She made some effort to lure Ralph along this same path of intellectual adventure, but he could not follow her. He was bored by Wells and sniggered at the racier passages in Moore exactly as he sniggered at a musical comedy. Moore was a ribald buffoon to him, in the same class as a woman who made money by showing her legs to the public.

"How did you like it?" Jane asked him, when he returned her copy of "Celibates."

"Pretty raw," he commented. "He gets by with murder all right, but I think he describes the scenery too much. I had to skip a lot of it."

Jane, who had a small but growing sense of beauty, was disgusted with this remark. It caused Ralph to shrivel in her estimation in a way that he could not have understood.

She began at this time to write fiction as well as to read more of it. Her short stories and novelettes all told practically the same tale. The heroine was always a proud and beautiful girl, easily recognizable as Jane's conception of herself. This fictive person had an almost Circean power of fascinating men and of making them grovel at her feet in an agony of infatuation. She always despised them for so grovelling and mercilessly sent them away to commit suicide or to become chronic drunkards. After a certain amount of such havoc had been wrought, there would appear a youth who was a paragon of intellect and pulchritude. To him, after a cleverly sustained suspense of several thousand words, the heroine would beatifically abandon herself in a setting of colourful and fragrant luxury, which was always described with the greatest detail and was usually the best part of the story.

Had Ralph seen these tales he might have read in them his own impending fate. But Jane, secretive and sensitive as are all beginning authors, did not even tell him about her literary efforts. The writing of them gave her a deep, almost physical satisfaction. She was extremely proud of them, and was wholly unable to see that they had a strong resemblance to much of the printed literature she was beginning to despise. She sent some of her best stories to the magazines, beginning, as seems to be the invariable cus-

tom among amateurs, with the *Saturday Evening Post,* and ultimately finding a market in *Snappy Stories* and *Young's.*

Once she had seen her name in print her destiny was decided. It had perhaps been in doubt for a time. If she had encountered a conventional man with force and patience enough to tame her, she might have become a grand dame of society and devoted her life to dress and entertainment, for both of which she had real aptitude. But having tasted ink she was bound to be an intellectual, just as a young lion that has tasted blood must kill, and will no longer do for the circus.

An important step in her emancipation was taken that winter when her grandmother died. Jane inherited a small income in her own right, and she now had no one to restrain her except her mother, who was greatly her inferior in both will and intelligence. For a while she revelled in the becoming mourning costumes and the increased supply of spending money which this fortunate demise had bestowed upon her. As soon as decorum would permit she took a trip to New York. Impelled by some sure instinct she went to a hotel near Washington Square from which Ralph received letters that steadily decreased in frequency and dwindled in size. Twice he offered to visit her over a week-end, but each time he received an evasive reply, mentioning a girl friend whom she had to entertain. Ralph, though unable to comprehend her intellectual development, was shrewd and quick in assessing this situation. He did not doubt that she had found a friend in New York, but he did doubt whether the friend was a girl. He was quick to sense duplicity because he was full of it himself. He felt thwarted, resentful and restless.

Jane did not even let him know when she returned to Washington. He happened upon her in a basement

café on F street, where she sat talking with a man he had never seen before. He stopped within a few yards of them and looked at Jane steadily until he caught her eye. She appeared to be not in the least embarrassed or distressed.

"Why, hello, Ralph!" she exclaimed rising and giving him her hand. Let me introduce you to Mr. Arnold. He's the editor of *Freedom* in New York and is just down here for a few days. He's going to give me a job on his magazine. Isn't that perfectly wo-o-o-onderful? Mr. Arnold, this is Mr. Dolan."

Arnold was a slim, wiry-looking man of about thirty with peculiarly vivid blue eyes. His smile was wide and quick, showing a fine set of teeth, but it was not altogether a kindly or good-natured smile. It seemed rather to express a cheerful and ironical defiance to all comers. He wore a suit that needed pressing and a soft shirt, and violated good taste by smoking a pipe in the café.

He gave Ralph a quick appraising look, which the latter resented.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr. Dolan. Won't you sit down?"

Ralph sat down, divided between reluctance and curiosity, feeling much more ill-at-ease than he was accustomed to feel. Arnold disposed himself in a slouching, but not ungraceful posture, with his legs stretched out under the table, and went on talking. He was an incessant and various talker, leaping from one subject to another with careless ease, seldom giving the others a chance for a word. When his thought was checked for a moment, he would utter a prolonged "A-a-a-h," in order to hold the floor until he could go on again. His longest pauses were occasioned by the necessity of lighting his pipe. He would strike a

match and hold it in his hand until it had almost burned his fingers, talking all the time, then make a swift pass at the bowl of his pipe and throw the match away.

He seemed to have been everywhere and to have done everything. Paris and Rome he knew as well as New York, and he frequently threw German and French phrases into his discourse without any apparent affectation. He had been in South America and Canada as well as in Europe. He had been a newspaper correspondent, a hobo and an I. W. W. He had presided over radical meetings on the East Side and worked as a dock hand in Rio de Janeiro. He commented on innumerable books and plays of which Ralph had never heard, and he was full of interesting gossip about literary, radical and theatrical persons in New York, many of whom he mentioned by their first names.

Ralph put him down for a four-flusher of the greatest skill, and envied him what he felt sure was a magnificent talent for lying. And yet he unmistakably felt the power of the man, knew intuitively that he was in the presence of a superior force—of one in whom the fire of life burned with an intensity he could not match. He felt dull and lumpish beside this man and he hated Arnold for making him feel so. He laughed at some of Arnold's sallies in spite of himself and was rankled at his inability to make any reply or to take any part in the conversation. He longed to assert himself somehow and could think of nothing to say or do. Arnold dominated the situation easily and completely, sprawling at his ease, wielding his pipe like a sceptre as he talked.

Most bitter of all to Ralph was the rapt attention which Jane gave her friend. She listened to him with parted lips, never taking her eyes away from his, seeming to forget that Ralph was there.

"How perfectly wo-o-o-onderful," she exclaimed now and then, and into this hard-worked expletive of hers she put an accent of honest admiration, almost of worship, which Ralph had never heard in it before. He stared at her morosely, noticing the faint flush in her face, the lightly moulded grace of her shoulders. He had never grown tired of her, and he longed for her now with the longing of unaccustomed separation. She had once been his and she was no longer. He knew that as well as though she had told him so. This man had something she wanted—something that he, Ralph, wholly lacked.

He could endure the situation no longer. He rose and took his leave, shaking hands with Arnold and giving Jane a deep, significant look which she did not seem to notice. He went to a nearby bar and ordered and drank three highballs in rapid succession. This was unusual for him. He was always ready to take a drink with a friend or to go on a spree in congenial company and alcohol never seemed to do him any harm. He drank for amusement and not to escape himself as do men who are at odds with life. But now he did need to escape himself. His battered and aching ego craved to be lifted and soothed.

The highballs comforted him after a fashion. His self-confidence was in a measure restored. What was this fellow after all? A Nut! A yammering impractical fool, probably always broke! Jane would regret her defection. Perhaps she would come back to him sometime. He meditated with gloomy pleasure upon how he would receive her, the things he would say to her. But he did not really expect her to come back.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I

He had lost not only a sweetheart, but also a social guide. With the help of Jane he had gained a foothold on the edge of society. His new contacts had given him great satisfaction and no little practical advantage. He was determined to go much farther in the same direction and had counted on Jane to show him the way. Her departure was therefore a serious practical loss as well as a blow to his vanity. Yet he had almost forgotten Jane in a few weeks, and quite by accident he discovered a new social adviser.

One of his regular haunts was a small Turkish bath conducted by an Irishman known to all of his patrons as Horace. Horace possessed a remarkable talent as a masseur, and it brought to his rubbing bench many kinds of men. In fact, it would have been hard to find anywhere in Washington a more varied and contrasting group of humans. A fashionable Episcopal rector, a prominent magazine writer, three or four prize fighters of various weights and nationalities, a baseball player or two, a corpulent banker and a Congressman afflicted with the lumbago might all be there at once, dripping in the hot room or cooking in the steam room, good-naturedly waiting their turn under Horace's dexterous hands. Most of them were regular patrons and came to know each other quite well in the curious, revealing fraternity of stark nakedness. Men who would have stood far apart with their clothes on somehow

found it easy to talk together in nothing but their skins, for the differences that separate most men into classes are small and artificial and clothes are the symbols of them. Here a man worth half a million, with his pendulous pot belly and his painfully varicose veins, seemed a piteous animal, while a young light-weight ring fighter with beautiful muscles rippling under a skin velvety with health looked like a prince.

Horace contributed to the prevailing atmosphere of Democracy by treating all men with absolute equality. Each had to wait his turn no matter what his worldly worth or dignity. Furthermore, when one side of his corporation had been conscientiously rubbed and slapped, he was always given the same direction in the same words:

"Turn over on your belly, young man."

When the posterior of the young man, who might be seventy, had been duly treated for whatever ailed it, he would be dismissed with a slap on the buttocks and the invariable words:

"There, young man, you're cured!"

At times Horace's place had much the air of a salon, for he found rubbing a great stimulus to discourse and he held opinions upon many subjects. War, politics, religion, medicine, marriage and a score of other weighty matters came in for review. The waiting patrons joined in the discussion. The place was filled with the flash and friction of hot argument. Absolute freedom of speech prevailed. The Episcopal rector heard with a tolerant smile much profanity and not a little obscenity, wisely realizing that here he was not the agent of a censorious God but merely a naked human waiting to have his hide rubbed.

Ralph found it pleasant to visit this place once or twice a week, especially after a convivial night. A sweat, a rub

and a plunge in the pool would make him feel like a man newly and perfectly created.

One day in the hot room he got into conversation with the occupant of the adjoining chair. His neighbour was a small lean man with a rather handsome and very grave face. His eyes were extremely deep-set, shadowed by heavy brows and had a fixed gravity of expression, all of which gave him a look of great wisdom and dignity.

He and Ralph discoursed of trivial matters for a few minutes, and the former seemed completely exhausted by the effort. He lay back in his chair, closing his eyes.

"God!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad this season is nearly over. I don't believe I could stand another month of it!"

"Overwork?" Ralph queried, not understanding what kind of a season was meant.

"No," the little man replied. "My business takes very little of my time. It's my social obligations that are wearing me out. I've had either a dinner or a dance engagement every night this week, and they were invitations of a sort that I simply could not refuse. Sometimes I'm tempted to chuck it all and go to Paris to live. . . . And yet I don't know that I would escape it there, either."

"Society is a bore," Ralph agreed. "I've gone out a good bit myself this past winter, and I've found that it robs me of more time and sleep than I can afford."

From this beginning they easily proceeded to a canvass of mutual acquaintances. Ralph found himself undergoing a veiled but acute cross-examination as to his social standing. Realizing that this man might be useful to him, he made his replies with the utmost care. He mentioned Mrs. Condell and Mrs. Pethwyck and other persons of high social considerations whose acquaintance he had made. He commented upon the interiors of their houses in a way which

appeared casual but afforded indubitable proof that he had crossed their exclusive thresholds. He did not say much about the many public charity events which had made up most of his social adventures, nor did he mention that a reporter had been his means of introduction to society.

His companion evidently liked him, and he seemed satisfied that Ralph was a person sufficiently well-connected for him to know without reproach, for when they parted he offered Ralph his hand.

"Balzell is my name," he said. "I live at the LaFayette in the winter. Drop in and see me some time—preferably on a Thursday or a Saturday afternoon about four o'clock."

Ralph accepted the invitation with casual graciousness, and that very afternoon he made some investigations to determine whether the appointment was worth keeping. His doubts were banished when he found that Balzell's name was in the social register, and from newspaper acquaintances he soon gathered the whole story of the Balzell family.

2

The elder Balzell, it appeared, had been a government scout and trapper of some reputation, who, after many narrow escapes from Indians and wild animals, fell a victim of rheumatism. Wandering across the prairies, a broken and despairing man, he had accidentally come upon a group of hot mineral springs and had been greatly benefited by bathing in them. He had promptly taken up a homestead on the spot and had spent the rest of his life there, bathing daily in the magical waters. For years he had lived precariously by farming in a small way and trading with the Indians, but toward the end of his life, other sufferers had discovered the wonderful spring. Balzell built a hotel, a

town grew up around it. He found himself first well-to-do, then wealthy, finally a millionaire of the standard American pioneer variety, dominating a town and a county.

His three children had all inherited large fortunes, but feeble constitutions and extremely sensitive nerves. The widow of the elder Balzell had moved to Washington upon his death and by reason of her wealth and her energetic character had established herself as a member of the Resident or Cave Dweller Set, before which presidents and diplomats are alleged to grovel.

Henry Balzell was the only survivor of this remarkable family. He had been carefully nursed from early youth, and had never been taught to do anything except to cherish the family fortune and to maintain the family social position. As the fortune was nearly all in land, which was managed by competent agents and brought in a large income, the first of these duties was a light one. Balzell's real life work was to keep the family name in the society columns. In his thin and sickly body dwelt some spark of the resolute spirit that had made his father a menace to savages, a conqueror of the wilderness. A grave and silent man, with no more joy of revelry in him than an owl, he had none-the-less conscientiously devoted his life to entertainment. Alcohol always gave him a head-ache, and yet he had consumed thousands of cocktails and endless gallons of champagne in the interests of good form. A man of very low vitality and not at all amorous, he cared little for women, and yet he had spent hundreds of weary evenings punctiliously pressed against fair bosoms, pushing their owners over polished hardwood floors. Truly he had suffered in the name of duty and honour.

Ralph called upon Balzell several times, and he soon found that the price of this man's favour was to listen to his

talk. When not engaged upon his stern social duties, Balzell was the victim of a profound *ennui,* as are most men who have no really vital interest in life. His own society was even more painful to him than that of others, and he was consequently the friend of any one who would sit and sip a drink with him and attend to his words. What he had to say was nearly all about society. He considered it a matter of the very first importance. The destiny of the nation, he firmly believed, was decided far more over tea-cups and dinner tables than in the halls and committee rooms on the hill, and there was enough truth in this view of the matter so that he could support it very plausibly. His faith in the importance of society was necessary to his very existence, for it made him out, indirectly, a man of power and consequence. It was true that he knew little about politics himself and was not privy to most of those reception room and boudoir intrigues which he believed to be of such grave consequence. But he regarded himself as one of the most important supporters of this all-powerful and indispensable social understructure of government.

"No man can succeed in Washington in a large way," he told Ralph, "without the approval of the best society. Nothing but the influence of the best people in society keeps this infernal radicalism from overrunning the country, Look at Senator Ryley of Texas, for instance. He came to the Senate on a platform that was positively incendiary—very dangerous indeed to property and law and order. He had even been called a socialist by some. But Ryley has been gradually transformed into a perfectly safe and useful man and good society in Washington is what did it—especially the Misses Watton. I suppose you have not met the Wattons? I must take you to call some day. They are two dear maiden ladies, very wealthy, and they have, I suppose,

the nearest thing to a *salon* that Washington can boast. They took up the senator at a time when he was refusing even to wear a dress suit on the ground that it wasn't democratic, and when he was making speeches of a positively subversive tone. No one else of good position would have anything to do with him. No one except the Misses Watton, I daresay, could have taken him up without danger. But those dear ladies saw that the senator had the makings of a gentleman. They admitted him to their reception room, and little by little they showed him that his policies were wrong, that all of the intelligence and wealth of the country were on the other side. They converted him into a man of the most sterling conservative principles. You know the result, I daresay. Senator Ryley was defeated, but he retired to take a place as counsel for a large corporation at fifty thousand dollars a year, and his return to political power is only a matter of time. Needless to say, he will return as an ardent defender of property and good government. Property must be defended against the encroachments of radicalism, and good society is its strongest fortress. That is why I devote so much time to it."

"The present administration," he said another time, "is bound to be a political failure in the long run because it has been a social failure. The best people simply have not taken up the President and his wife. It is always a little harder for a Democratic administration to win social recognition than it is for a Republican one, because there has always been a slight flavour of radicalism about the Democratic party. Even so, the President might have won the confidence of the best people here in Washington if he had gone about it right. For my part, I deeply regret that he failed. I was always in favour of more *rapprochements* between society and the White House. But somehow they never came

about. It seems incredible, but some of the very best people in Washington have never met the President. That spells the doom of any administration.

"The result of it all is that society has degenerated. It has broken into cliques for lack of leadership. This has been one of the poorest seasons that Washington has seen in a quarter of a century. Entertaining has been very lax and informal and the merest bounders have won a place of a sort. At some very good houses I have met persons whom I scarcely cared to shake hands with. And the matter of precedence has been so sadly neglected. There is nothing more important than the social precedence of officials, and it has never been observed in this country as it should be. We are way behind Europe in that respect. Incredible as it may seem, there are some points of precedence that never have been finally decided—for example, whether the Admiral of the Navy outranks the Secretary of the Navy, and whether ambassadors should precede or follow the vice-president. Deciding these points with any finality is always made difficult by the fact that new officials, especially from the west, often profess at first to take no account of precedence. Sometimes they lose the places that rightly belong to them. But before long you see them looking around at dinner to learn whether they have been rightly placed, and often controversies are started—very undignified indeed."

Ralph listened to all this and a great deal more like it, sipping Balzell's excellent liquors, nodding his head gravely, as though he knew all about such matters. He was wondering the while how much of a liar Balzell was, whether he really enjoyed all the high connections and valuable *entrées* that he claimed.

Balzell was always about to introduce him to this and

that important personage, but he was slow about fulfilling these promises. His social prestige and his money were his two points of distinction. Without them he would have been a feeble and insignificant man. He was consequently chary about sharing them with any one. He needed Ralph as a visitor and a listener to help fill that tedious gap between the time he crawled out of bed late in the morning and the hour for putting on his dress suit in the evening, and he doled out just enough of his social favour to keep the young man interested.

Thus he took Ralph one afternoon to call successively on a dozen of the girls whose débuts into Washington society had been announced for that fall. These maidens were all being groomed and coached for their assault on the social citadel, which was as perfectly standardized as a military manœuvre. Each of them would have her picture in all of the local papers, and would in due course be presented to society at an expensive party at Rauscher's. Her father or mother would be permitted to buy a box at the débutantes' ball for a hundred and fifty dollars or more. Thus far all of them would go, and the great majority of them would go little farther. Any girl with the slightest claim to social consideration and enough money to pay the bills could make a début, but only a girl of exceptional beauty or wealth or of very exalted social position could hope to win the prizes of popularity and a really desirable husband. The girls who could not shine with some such special lustre would struggle bravely for a while, praying for escorts and dancing partners, going at last inevitably to the wall to sit beside chaperones and weep in dressing rooms. Of handsome young officers and wealthy native sons and titled young diplomatic attachés there were never nearly enough to go around. They were hunted hard by the prettiest girls with the most

money and finally led in triumph by their captors to the altars of Espiscopal churches. Perhaps one débutante in ten achieved such a glorious fulfilment of her dream, amid the pealing of organs and the fragance of orange blossoms and the envious glances of those who had failed. Most of these society buds ultimately went back to small towns and married fellows they had known in high school.

Balzell, it appeared, always made a point of calling upon all of the season's débutantes, even the daughters of congressmen, in order that he might carefully assess them in advance. Most of them never got a second look from him. Perhaps he was always hoping to discover some rare creature who would light for him the fire of romance and warm the cold and arid waste of his being. But always he discovered one more crop of scared, homely little girls who ogled and giggled at him hopefully and a few splendid conquering animals upon whom he made no more impression than did the furniture.

Ralph found this tour of inspection a bore. Time and again he pulled off his overcoat in the front hall, sometimes with the help of a butler and sometimes unassisted. Repeatedly he pressed a fair hand extended across a fashionable wicker tea-table, swallowed a very small cupful of tea and lemon juice, and went away again after about fifteen minutes of effortful conversation.

In only one of the places they visited did he feel at home and interested. That was the apartment of Mrs. James B. Shorts in Rockwall Courts. Rockwall Courts was one of the most expensive and fashionable apartment houses in Washington—a huge, gloomy-looking pile of grey stone, with a paved court and drive-way bit into the front of it and a uniformed attendant to push the heavy revolving door—and Mrs. Shorts had one of the largest and most

expensive apartments in the house. Her reception room was heavily over-furnished in mahogany and dark green hangings. There were too many pictures on the wall, too many cushions on the settee, and too much brass and marble bric-a-brac perching on every available bit of space. Mrs. Shorts, a woman of fifty, was large without being fat. Her great forearms and ample hands showed a fine play of muscle and tendon, suggestive of the washtub and the rolling pin, and this effect of rude strength was enhanced by the profusion of diamond rings and bracelets which she wore. Her face was heavy of feature, deeply lined and abeam with shrewd good humour.

"I'm real glad to meet you, Mr. Dolan," she said. "This is my daughter, Gwendolyn."

Gwendolyn was a maiden too ample for modern occidental standards of beauty and yet not at all unpleasing to the eye. The somewhat excessive beam and bulge of her figure were set off by trim ankles, an olive skin of velvety richness, abundant brown hair and great soft stupid eyes like those of a bottle-raised heifer. Her smile showed perfect teeth and a profound placidity. A fine buxom country lass, she was, cured of her freckles and sunburn by beauty doctors, coiffured and gowned by artists. She said almost nothing and her silence became her. Now and again when the conversation afforded some slight excuse, she uttered a low and very pleasant laugh, which came bubbling up easily from the region of her diaphragm. She was as restful to look upon as a blue-grass pasture on a summer evening when the cattle chew their cuds and long shadows lie down to sleep under the trees.

Gwendolyn made a most favourable impression upon Ralph. She did not excite him. He felt in her no sharp disturbing challenge. He merely looked at her with pleas-

ure and knew that he would like to look at her again. She gave him a feeling of guarded contentment. He smiled at her and she smiled back at him with frank interested friendliness. It was a smile in which like answered to like. For he too was a countryman by origin—a peasant transplanted by chance, surviving and thriving by his peasant cunning and strength. He had nothing in common with such sensitive, cerebral creatures as Jane Belden. In this girl was a deep unperturbed vitality like his own, and he felt its presence comfortably, almost unconsciously, as one feels sunlight on an autumn day.

Mrs. Shorts presided at the tea-table, which was overloaded with several varieties of the colourful little cakes that fashionable caterers sell. Her tea-cups were too large and she was too insistent in trying to make her guests eat. But Ralph was not at all offended by these digressions from good form. His lusty appetite had been tantalized all afternoon by nibbles of this and that. He devoured with satisfaction three mocha tarts, drank a large cup of tea and smoked a cigar which Gwendolyn brought him. He felt good and would just as soon have stayed all afternoon.

Mrs. Shorts played with crude transparent cunning the part of a mother who is putting a marriageable daughter on the market. She contrived with elaborate casualness to tell a great many interesting things about Gwendolyn, such as that she had just returned from a trip to Europe and that she was studying voice culture with a famous teacher who proclaimed her voice one of the best contraltos he had ever heard. The gentlemen also learned that Gwendolyn had a great deal of temperament, which they would otherwise never have suspected, and that she could swim a mile and a half, which was easier to believe, for she had the build and blubber of a seal.

Mrs. Shorts was obviously interested to know more about Ralph, for she had not missed the warm smiles which he had elicted from her daughter. She tried discreetly to draw him out, and he finally said something about the Press Gallery which gave her a needed opening.

"And so you are a newspaper reporter, Mr. Dolan?" she enquired. It was as plain as though she had said so that a newspaper reporter was a person of small consequence in her eyes.

"I am Washington correspondent for the Philadelphia *Star*," Ralph replied with dignity.

"Ah, indeed!" said Mrs. Shorts.

It was evident that Mrs. Shorts was chiefly interested in Balzell, to whom she directed most of her conversation, and it was equally evident that Gwendolyn could not see Balzell at all so long as the virile and handsome Ralph was present.

"You must come and see us again, Mr. Dolan," she told him as he was leaving.

"Yes, do," Mrs. Shorts endorsed the invitation politely but was looking at Balzell all the time. "And of course we'll see you soon again, Mr. Balzell. . . . Old friends must not forget each other, must they?"

3

"I feel that I owe you a sort of an apology for dragging you into that place," Balzell told Ralph as they walked down Connecticut Avenue. "Those people are the merest bounders, as any one could tell. Wasn't it simply frightful the way that pink lampshade fought with the hangings? Why is it these *nouveau riche* people are always colour blind? And the old lady—a washerwoman plastered with diamonds. The girl is nothing but a great big chunk of tallow. I

simply cannot stand fat girls. Every time I've had to dance with her I've wished for a wheel-barrow. . . . The only reason I go there is that they are family friends of a sort. Old man Shorts—his real name was Schwartz—knew my father in the west years ago. They were business partners in some venture or other. Old Schwartz made a million at least in the cattle business. After he died the old lady changed her name and came to Washington with her darling only daughter, determined to marry her to a title, or at least to a social position. She's been grooming her for a couple of years now. Gwendolyn has been put through a finishing school and a European tour. She's had about twenty pounds rubbed off of her by masseurs, the old lady has bought her a three-thousand-dollar Paris outfit and she's ready to make her début this fall. They're both going to be terribly disappointed, of course. . . ."

Ralph laughed a somewhat forced laugh.

"Does the girl get all the money?" he enquired casually. "A million ought to help some toward landing a count or whatever it is they want."

"Oh, Gwendolyn'll get the money all right," Balzell assured him. "But a million dollars isn't enough to put a fat girl across in Washington any more, especially with that ogre of a mother behind her back. Mrs. Shorts will spend the first year trying desperately to lure young diplomats and New York millionaires to her flat, without any success. About the end of her second season Gwendolyn will marry some nice commonplace young man who needs her money, and she'll make him a good wife and be happy ever after. But the old lady will never get over it."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1

After a long period of dulness and apathy, the country was vividly astir. The munitions industries were booming. Two new watchwords blossomed forth in the newspapers and were shouted from rostrum and pulpit—preparedness and sympathy. Every good American favoured preparedness. And every good American felt sympathy—sympathy for poor little Belgium populated almost exclusively by raped women and starving babies, sympathy for gallant little France fighting the battle of civilization, sympathy for our British blood brothers who were standing staunchly between us and invasion.

All this activity reacted favourably upon Washington. A great preparedness parade was staged there. Various organizations interested in preparedness opened headquarters and employed secretaries, press agents and stenographers. The lean days were passing, though no one dreamed what fat days were coming.

2

Ralph thought seriously of devoting himself to this new cause of preparedness in the capacity of a press agent, for he saw that a great deal of money was behind it. But he was marked for a higher destiny. He was no longer to be a press agent. He was to be a lobbyist. Had he understood himself aright he would have realized that in due course he must become a lobbyist almost as surely as a tadpole

becomes a frog. Nearly all good press agents become lobbyists.

The agent of his translation was one Colonel Melvane.

The Colonel was a man at once well known and mysterious. All who knew him knew that he had been a close friend of President McKinley. He was also known as a manufacturer and had even been referred to in the public prints as a prominent manufacturer, though exactly what he prominently manufactured, or where, no one seemed to know. He had at one time been a detective, and it was said that in a still earlier avatar he had been a bar-tender, although this fact was now forgotten by all of his friends. His most important present connection was with the National Commercial Association—an organization composed chiefly of manufacturers which maintained a suite of offices in a large downtown office building.

No one knew exactly what the colonel did for the Association. He sometimes disappeared from Washington for long periods. Again he would be seen every day for a month or more in the halls of the capitol and the House and Senate office buildings. He was closeted at times with important men. This seemed appropriate for he had all the marks and movements of an important man himself. He was large and rubicund and wore white hair and a frock coat. His manner was the model of discretion. He never opened his eyes wide and never raised his voice. He made the impression of being always confidently engaged upon some delicate and secret mission.

Ralph had long enjoyed a cordial acquaintance with the Colonel. They had lunched together and discussed political matters in a discreet fashion. Several times Ralph had been able to give the Colonel items of information which he seemed very much to want.

Men of the same type of mind recognize each other as quickly and surely as though by some special sense. This felt congeniality of viewpoint and purpose existed to a marked degree between Ralph and the Colonel. Ralph was not surprised when the Colonel one day asked him a favour.

"Do you know Nelson, secretary of the House Committee on Public Lands?" the Colonel asked him as they were lunching at the same table in the lunch room of the House Office Building.

"Yes, I know him well," Ralph replied. "Used to run around with him a bit when I was a secretary myself."

"I have a couple of friends who want very much to make his acquaintance," the Colonel explained, "and I never met the man. I wonder if you would mind taking them around to his office some day this week."

The request was casual enough, but the Colonel made it with a significant look in his eye.

"I'll be glad to do it," Ralph told him.

Ralph was in due course presented to two gentlemen from Oklahoma. They did not go with him to the office of the Committee on Public Lands. Ralph dropped in first and was talking to Nelson when they passed the door, glanced in and hailed him. He called them in and presented them to Nelson. The meeting had every appearance of being perfectly casual. He left the two gentlemen in cordial and pleasant converse with the secretary and he saw them about the town with him several times afterward.

Ralph had no difficulty in divining the purpose of all this. A bill for the leasing of government-owned oil lands to private operators was then in the hands of the Committee on Public Lands. The secretary of the committee would know more about its terms and its prospects than any one else except the members of the committee. The two gentle-

men from Oklahoma desired to extract what information they could from the secretary by whatever method might prove most effective.

Ralph had no idea of letting the Colonel think that he, Ralph, had been an innocent catspaw in this matter.

"How did those two oil men make out with Nelson?" he asked the Colonel the next time he met him. The Colonel laughed.

"I don't know," he replied. "I only agreed to get them the introduction. . . . By the way, Dolan," he went on, "you've done several little favours for me lately and perhaps I can do you one. The Association is taking on another man soon, and they have asked me to suggest some one. The place would pay only about a hundred a week at first, but there's a good prospect of advancement in it. You would do some publicity stuff and also some other work—interviewing congressmen and the like."

"Thanks," said Ralph. "The hundred a week doesn't tempt me much just now, but I would like to work for the Association. Let me know when they are ready to do business."

3

A few weeks later Ralph was installed in a neat little office which was one of a suite of offices on the eleventh floor of a downtown office building. The name of the Association was emblazoned on the door in large letters and his own beneath in small ones. A private stenographer sat in a corner powdering her nose and waiting for him to think of something to dictate. He had less to do and received more money for doing it than ever before in his life. He felt that he was rapidly arriving.

The National Commercial Association was a Washington lobby of the new style.

The head of the organization was John A. Cordell, who bore the title of general counsel. In addition to a large salary, he was given by the Association a house on Massachusetts Avenue and a generous fund for entertainment. Entertainment was his chief function in Washington. At his home and at fashionable clubs he gave many small exclusive dinners and luncheons. Leading Republicans of the more conservative variety attended these affairs and at them the state of the nation was gravely discussed over good liquor, with special reference to the interests of manufacturers.

There was no taint of the lobbyist about Cordell. He was a lawyer and a man of society. He never went to the Capitol. Colonel Melvane, on the other hand, did not come regularly to the Association offices and spent most of his time at the Capitol when in Washington. He was independent of Cordell to the extent that he drew his salary from and made his report to the general headquarters of the Association in New York.

By far the most important of his activities, from his own point-of-view, was the writing of his reports. He took the greatest of pains with these compositions, for upon them depended his standing with his employers. Although he possessed considerable facility and even some eloquence in the use of words, he was subject to slips of grammar and spelling, which he was eager to avoid. For this reason he generally had Ralph read over a report and edit it before it was sent in, and from these documents Ralph gradually gleaned the whole story of the Colonel's activities.

His work outside of Washington—his field work, as he called it—was of far more practical effect than what he

did at the Capitol. In fact, it was about the only activity of the entire Association Staff in Washington which was of any marked practical value to the manufacturers. For the Colonel was a strikebreaker of great experience and efficiency, and had also some special aptitude in the management of political campaigns.

Whenever there was a strike which involved factories owned by members of the Association, Melvane was sent to the scene with a large fund of money. This he used in bribing labour leaders to call off or compromise the strike. His value lay in the fact that he knew all the labour leaders, just which ones could be bought and for how much. He had an almost Italian love of intrigue and secrecy, and kept his work admirably under cover.

Besides his activity as a strikebreaker the Colonel was sent to the scene of every political campaign in which the Association was especially interested. For the Association always aided a congressman who had conspicuously favoured its policies and worked against one who had opposed them. From office files and office gossip Ralph was able to glean pretty much the whole record of this campaigning during the years that the Association had been active in Washington. The Washington office had been established during the outburst of so-called radicalism which took place in the early years of the century, when the muck-raking magazines were digging into the corporation records and the new friend-of-the-people type of statesman was replacing the good old-fashioned fellow who accepted his agency of wealth without deceiving either himself or his masters. At that time American business men, always easily frightened, felt sure that they faced an assault on the foundations of the property system. Hence the members of the National Commercial Association were easily persuaded that they

needed an expensive staff of experts in Washington to oppose radical legislation. Once the staff was established, its main business was to keep its employers persuaded that it was fighting a desperate fight against an insidious foe, and that much money was needed to keep up the struggle.

"Our battle against class legislation" was the Colonel's favourite phrase in his reports, and he made it clear to the monied men in New York that it was a desperate battle of many engagements.

"We have won a great victory in this committee" he wrote his employers when a man friendly to the association was given a place on the Committee on Labour. The appointment was probably inevitable, and the man had always been a conservative, but the Colonel was adroit in giving himself full credit for almost anything he wished.

"I am studying the record of Representative Green of New Jersey," he wrote one day. "He is the author of an anti-injunction bill, and has made speeches of a very radical tone." A few days later Representative Green would again be mentioned. "Called on Green today and had a long, intimate talk with him. I pointed out to him that members of our organization are strong in his district and that they could easily be organized against him. Before I left his office he was not so radical. The mere presence here of a representative of the Association is an incalculable force against class legislation." And a few weeks later, "Green has come around to our way of thinking in a manner that is most gratifying. I can personally guarantee that he will vote our way on tariff, child labour and all anti-injunction and eight-hour legislation." Still later: "Green is up against a hard fight in his district this fall and he certainly deserves all the help the Association can give him. If I am sent into his district with ten thousand dollars, I feel pretty

sure that I can keep him in Congress, where he promises to be increasingly useful to us."

In due course the Colonel would get perhaps three or four thousand dollars and would spend a few weeks in Green's district. There was no exact accounting for the money, some of which doubtless stuck to the Colonel's fingers and some to Green's. The rest went into the pockets of those labour leaders with whom the Colonel had such an interesting and useful acquaintance. In cases such as this they served him by organizing workingmen's clubs to vote for the candidate whom the Association favoured.

In these undertakings the Colonel was adroit, secretive and effective in a small way, just as he was in everything else. And yet the records of the Association showed that nearly every man it helped was ultimately defeated. This was probably not because its assistance was not useful, but because its conquests were mostly among politicians in desperate straits, who were doomed to defeat anyway. Most conservative politicians favoured it as a matter of course. Most of those who opposed its policies did so because their political bread was really buttered on the other side, and these men often showed the Colonel the door in a summary manner which he never described in his reports. Some of his most spectacular conquests, Ralph had reason to believe, were carefully arranged. He strongly suspected that Green, a Chicago police court lawyer of bad reputation, had shown symptoms of radicalism at the suggestion of the Colonel, and that the two had divided the proceeds of his political conversion.

At the time Ralph entered the service of the Association, the Colonel's activities were being greatly curtailed by circumstance. The boom in munitions-making was rapidly putting an end to the struggle between capital and labour both

in Congress and out. The kind of "class legislation" against which the Colonel had fought so long and so valiantly was for the time being largely forgotten, and there were few strikes. In this situation the Colonel was hard put to find things to do and to write about. He made a complete survey of the House of Representatives, learning how each man stood on the policies of the Association. He compiled a black list and a white list. He wrote interminable reports about what should be done to and for this, that and the other man.

Above all, he spared no pains to show his power over those few congressmen who had really come under his influence. There were four or five of these, such as Green, who had accepted the assistance of the Association and could not afford to offend its representatives. The Colonel haunted the offices of these men. He used their franked envelopes for his personal correspondence and for that of the Association. He had books and reports bound on their credit at the Government Printing Office. All of this he reported to his superiors by way of showing how he had held Congress in the hollow of his hand. He took special pride in mailing his reports in franked envelopes. All of this had the approval of Cordell, who also liked to use congressional stationery without a stamp.

One of the men who had accepted assistance from the Colonel in his last campaign was a young Congressman from the middle west, named Polter. In an address before a Woman's Club he spoke in favour of a child labour bill, solely to please his feminine hearers and not because he knew or cared anything about child labour. When the Colonel read about this in the newspapers, he went immediately to Polter's office and gave him a sound scolding. Polter was

then compelled to go to the Association offices and take a rating from Cordell. Both of these gentlemen mentioned the matter with proper dignity in their reports to the New York office, and the Colonel opined that "Polter has learned his lesson and will not commit any more such indiscretions."

He enormously enjoyed bullying a man such as Polter. In fact a love of bullying and a love of secrecy and intrigue were the two strongest motives in the Colonel. He craved to feel that he was exerting a subtle hidden power over men and things. He was in this regard the exact antithesis of the typical politician, who is impelled into public life by a desire to climb upon something high and make a display of his person and his voice.

Happily, there was abundant occupation in Washington for Melvanes and Cordells. A loud voice was no longer necessary for a career in the capital. Just as in war each man on the firing line requires the support of several behind it, so for every politician with a loud voice in Congress there must be several soft-voiced gentlemen in the background to prompt and advise him. Washington was becoming full of organizations more or less like the National Commercial Association. They were all there to combat dangers—dangers of radicalism, of unpreparedness, of immorality in all its insidious forms. Constantly they grew in size and strength. And not only did they grow, but also they bred, for each cause was apt to give rise to a counter cause and to several little subsidiary causes. Moreover, the government was always growing, so that every year it took more men to govern the government. The small political infection planted in our midst by the founding fathers had become a huge tumor with a seemingly unlimited capacity for growth. There was no apparent reason why we should

not all in due course become politicians and lobbyists, except for the sordid necessity that some one get the wherewithal out of the ground and through the factories.

Of all this one very pleasant thing may be said—that it provided an easy and congenial living for a number of amiable gentlemen who might otherwise have been put to the inconvenience of working. Of this favoured band Ralph had now become one. He wrote articles and editorials for newspapers friendly to the Association, interviewed congressmen and senators and acted as a go-between for Melvane and Cordell, who made a point of never being seen together. He was Cordell's right-hand man, and was highly commended to the New York office for his discretion and loyalty. His success as a lobbyist was assured.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I

Ralph had now become a regular caller at the apartment of Mrs. Shorts in Rockwall Courts, where he was welcomed by Gwendolyn and tolerated by her mother.

His relation to this girl was of a kind new to him. Although he had known her for several months, their flirtation, if it could be called that, had not proceeded beyond the exchange of warm and mutually appreciative smiles. He never saw her alone for more than a few minutes at a time. Mrs. Shorts seemed interested in preventing private interviews between them, and Gwendolyn, besides, was constantly occupied with the exacting business of making her début. When not actually attending or giving entertainments she was engaged with dressmakers or poring over invitation lists with her mother. To both of the women this début was a matter of the very first importance and they put every bit of their energy and ingenuity into it.

Ralph was to them, and especially to the mother, a useful young man. Good-looking, well-dressed men who can dance are always scarce in Washington society. Hence when Mrs. Shorts was making up a theatre party or an invitation list for a dance, Ralph was apt to be included because he was needed. Gwendolyn always wanted him invited. Mrs. Shorts did not like the idea of encouraging a mere newspaper reporter too much, especially when he was so good-looking, but she felt sure that she could manage her daughter. And Ralph was so discreet and polite, so dexterously

useful, that she could not easily dispense with him. Moreover, she was not at all sure that he was not a young man of fortune. He dressed perfectly and came to call now in a neat little closed car. It seemed improbable to her that such evident affluence was earned by newspaper work, of which she had always thought as a most unremunerative occupation. She threw out some polite feelers designed to elicit information as to Ralph's financial status, and he politely replied in a way culculated to increase her mystification. His manner toward her was one of admiring deference. He had long since learned the lesson that preferment in society is won by being polite to old women, just as progress in politics and business is most easily made by bending a supple knee to old men.

While thus making for himself a small but secure place in the favour of the Shorts family, where he could sit and bide his time, he encountered some interesting persons at their afternoon teas. Old man Schwartz had evidently been a personality of real strength, for Ralph learned of nearly all the most desirable callers at the Shorts apartment that they had been friends of the father. Such, for example, was General Richard P. Bledsoe, who had met Mr. Schwartz during the Indian campaigns in the west, and held his memory in such high esteem that he paid a painfully perfunctory call at the Shorts apartment about twice a month in company with his young wife, and also gave a small reception in honour of Gwendolyn.

The general was seventy-one years of age and of course retired from the Army. He was a person of the highest social consideration, for he came of an excellent Philadelphia family, was wealthy, and had distinguished himself in the Civil War and in the campaigns against the Sioux and

the Comanches. He owned one of those large ivy-covered red-brick houses with brownstone trimmings, which belong to the oldest vintage of Washington magnificence. There, for a time after his retirement, he had dwelt alone in great dim chambers filled with trophies of his Indian fights and portraits of the first Mrs. Bledsoe, seeing little of society. His devotion to the memory of his first wife had been well known and had lent to his old age a touch of melancholy romance, until, a few years before Ralph met him, he had married a girl of nineteen who had been employed as a stenographer in the preparation of his memoirs.

The second Mrs. Bledsoe interested Ralph, and she interested him at first chiefly because he evidently interested her. Like most shrewd men who have much to do with women Ralph had come to realize that they control the initiative in flirtation. As he moved about in society some women smiled upon him in a way that he recognized as an invitation or a challenge. If he did not immediately respond, they would often find some still more obvious way of expressing their interest in him. They required only a little co-operation to bring about whatever they desired. And those who were indifferent to him or afraid of him were equally successful in keeping him at a distance. In a word, he realized that the overwhelming aggressiveness, which is supposed to be the masculine prerogative in love, is really a force nicely held on tap by women and brought forth by them at will. In the engagements of sex a man may occasionally execute a successful retreat, but he never wins a genuine victory. Hence Ralph had become more and more passive in his attitude toward women, and even a little coy.

Young Mrs. Bledsoe favoured Ralph, the first time they met, with a warm spontaneous smile and an unmistakably

interested look. She was a handsome young woman with a brilliant skin and a fine profile which she accentuated by brushing back her reddish blonde hair rather sharply from her face toward a coiffure higher than was usually worn at that time, and faintly suggestive of the mode affected by the court ladies of the eighteenth century. As long as she remained seated she was decidedly pleasing to the eye, but when she rose and walked across the room she left about half of her dignity behind, for her gait was too precipitate and had a trace of waddle about it. It expressed a certain nervous clumsiness, inevitable perhaps in a simple young woman who had been elevated suddenly to a high and uncomfortable social position.

Ralph had met Mrs. Bledsoe and danced with her several times before he had an opportunity of exchanging more than a few words with her. At a crowded reception in the Pan-American building it became his duty to get her an ice and he found himself, as a result of this gallantry, seated beside her on a marble staircase behind a row of palms growing in buckets.

Mrs. Bledsoe talked incessantly, always about herself, and with naïve frankness. She told Ralph all about her early life in Savannah, Georgia. Like nearly all southerners, she came of an old and distinguished family which had been poor since the Civil War. Under the necessity of making her own living she had come to Washington, because, as she frankly admitted, she could not face the ordeal of working as a stenographer in her home town. She had been secretary to a Georgia Congressman at first, and then to her future husband, who had selected her for this position, as he afterward admitted, because of her resemblance to his first wife.

As they were talking the white-haired General was to be

seen making his way through the crowd toward an unoccupied chair, into which he sank with a slouch that was eloquent of weariness and boredom.

"The poor old dear!" Mrs. Bledsoe exclaimed with tender compassion. "I can see that he's dead tired. I must take him home pretty soon. You know, I'm crazy about society and he's perfectly lovely about taking me places. I know he's often bored to death, but he won't admit it."

"You like Washington society then?" Ralph enquired.

"Yes. But I'm getting kind of tired of it now. This is my third season here," she explained. "My ambition now is to go to Europe for a few years. You know—I suppose you've seen it in the papers—the General has been mentioned for Ambassador to Denmark. I'm just dying for him to get it. Think of all that court life and everything! Wouldn't it be wonderful? But there are several other candidates for the place and I have no idea whether the General will get it or not. The suspense is nearly killing me. I wish there were something I could do about it. You're a newspaperman and know all about such things. Is there anything one can do to get a diplomatic post?"

Ralph, who was much more interested by these disclosures than he cared to show, laughed and replied in a casual tone.

"I imagine there's a good deal that might be done," he told her. "I used to be Washington correspondent for the Philadelphia *Star,* and I still do some work for the paper occasionally. If I should get a chance to put in a line that might help your husband, I'll be very glad to do so."

"Oh, I would be so grateful!" she assured him. "Won't you come to see us some time so that we can talk it over? Come to tea next Thursday, and come early—about three o'clock."

In this situation Ralph smelt opportunity with a sure

and discriminating nose. Mrs. Bledsoe, naïve, confiding, vain and restless with the acute restlessness of a young woman bound to a senile man, was surely marked in his mind as a valuable discovery.

He still retained a connection with the Philadelphia *Star* because it gave him needed access to the Press Gallery and the White House. He wrote occasional feature stories for the paper and gave its regular correspondent such bits of news as came his way in the course of his work as a lobbyist.

He had taken special pains to keep in touch with the secretarial force at the White House, feeling sure favour in that quarter would sooner or later be useful to him. He had been a consistent supporter of the administration and had missed no opportunity to give the President's secretary a place in his stories. All of this had created a friendly attitude toward him in the executive offices. His standing there was an easy and familiar one. It was not at all difficult for him to bring up the matter of the Danish post.

"What about the new Ambassador to Denmark, Jim?" he asked the secretary one day. "I've got to watch that appointment because two of the three men that have been mentioned for the place are from Philadelphia. A little advance dope on the subject would be very useful to me. I could write a big feature story on the man that's going to get it, if I was sure which one he is, and have it ready to use the day the appointment is announced. Evidently it's going to be either old General Bledsoe or else Dr. Alanson."

"Well, Ralph," the secretary replied good-naturedly. "You know I can't give any advance information on diplomatic appointments."

"Of course you can't," Ralph agreed. "But I thought may-

be you could tip me off to some one who knows about the President's attitude toward these men."

"I don't mind telling you this much," the secretary replied carelessly. "Dr. Alanson doesn't stand as well with the administration as his friends pretend that he does."

It was all that Ralph needed to know. He felt sure from his own investigations that the third man was not an important factor in the case. He was practically certain now that General Bledsoe would be offered the post provided he showed any willingness to accept it.

His next step was to concoct a gossipy, plausible story stating just the opposite—that Dr. Alanson was the probable appointee and that it was rumoured he had already been offered the post by the President. He had no difficulty in getting this piece printed in the *Star*, and he knew that the other Philadelphia papers would carry brief versions of it the next day. The General, of course, took the Philadelphia papers. The Bledsoes would be sure to see the item.

2

He was not at all surprised to find Mrs. Bledsoe alone when he called the following Thursday. It was more than an hour before the fashionable time for tea, so that no other guests had come, and the General, he learned, had gone to the Cosmos Club, but would be home soon.

His plan was working like a new machine. A brief paragraph in the Philadelphia *Ledger* summarizing his story about Alanson was the first thing Mrs. Bledsoe mentioned after greeting him. She brought him the paper and showed it to him.

"It's too bad," he said, shaking his head over the item. "Isn't it perfectly dreadful? Do you suppose that's true?

Do you think there's any chance left at all for my husband to be appointed?"

"I should think there might be a very good chance left," Ralph assured her, "if the thing were managed rightly."

"But what can I do?" she wanted to know. "I'm going to be frank with you, Mr. Dolan, because somehow I feel sure that I can trust you. My husband really doesn't care much about this appointment. He only consented to let his name be mentioned because I begged him to. . . . I do so want to go to Europe. . . . He promised that he would accept the place if it was offered to him, but he won't do a thing to get it. He's sort of old-fashioned, you know. And I'll bet these other people are pulling all sorts of wires. . . . They're going to take it right away from us." (She was almost breathless with eagerness.) "That's why I wanted to talk to you, Mr. Dolan. I'm sure you can help me if you only will."

"I'll be very glad to do anything I can," Ralph assured her politely.

"But I want you to do a lot," she explained. "Of course the General musn't know anything about it. But I've got some money of my own—quite a lot of it. I want to employ you to be my press agent or lobbyist or whatever it takes to get a diplomatic post. Please say you'll do it!"

"My dear Mrs. Bledsoe," Ralph demurred. "My time is pretty valuable and it is taken up with other matters. If I should accept your kind offer and devote myself to obtaining this appointment, and if by any chance I failed, I am afraid you would feel that you had not been treated fairly. . . ."

"No, honestly I wouldn't," she told him. "I want to feel that everything possible is being done at least. I've

got three thousand dollars that I could spend on it. Would that be enough to do any good?"

"Really, Mrs. Bledsoe, I would rather just do what I can in spare moments and say nothing about money. . . . It will be a pleasure to help you if I can."

"But that isn't what I want," she protested. "I want you to work on this thing just as hard as you can, and I want to pay you for it."

"Well," Ralph agreed with carefully feigned reluctance. "I'll tell you what we'll do. You may deposit the three thousand to my credit in a bank with the understanding that I will not claim it unless the General is offered the appointment. I will then do everything possible to obtain it for him on two conditions. You must not say anything about my connection with the matter, and you must do just as I tell you in the matter of entertaining. . . ."

"Of course," she agreed eagerly. "I'll do just as you say."

"You see," Ralph explained, "publicity will do a good deal. Usually the man who gets the most publicity wins. I flatter myself that I can manage the newspaper part of it fairly well. I will see that articles predicting the General's appointment, and giving some information about his career, are published in the Philadelphia papers within a few days. But in addition to that, the right persons must be entertained in the right way. You have no idea, Mrs. Bledsoe, how much a charming woman can accomplish in Washington. I will suggest certain persons and dates, and the rest, I think, will be easy for you. . . ."

They changed the subject suddenly when the General came in. He was a thin, fine-featured, gentle old man, with white hair and a yellowish skin having that almost

transparent appearance which sometimes comes with old age. As he seated himself in an armchair, leaned back and closed his eyes for a moment, he looked fragile, saintly and exceedingly tired. It was hard to imagine that this weak, gentle-looking creature had once led cavalry charges and slaughtered savages and conquered beautiful women. He was the thin yellow ash of a flame of life that had burned hotly and burned out.

Ralph did not think of him in exactly that way, but he did look from the weary old man to his ambitious young spouse and reflect that the General had certainly undertaken one adventure too many and too late.

3

Ralph found it easy to carry out his share of the bargain he had made with Mrs. Bledsoe. He soon had items in the Philadelphia newspapers which stated on a high authority who would not be quoted that the General was almost sure to be offered the appointment. The publisher of the *Star* happened to be a personal friend of the General, so that it was no trouble to have a Sunday feature story published which told all about General Bledsoe's military record and was accompanied by a picture of the veteran wearing all of his medals.

The entertaining was even simpler and also very pleasant. Ralph instructed Mrs. Bledsoe to invite to dinner various officials of the State Department and members of the Diplomatic Corps. He was of course included in all of these. Mrs. Bledsoe was a little afraid of her important guests.

"What shall I say to them?" she asked Ralph on the eve of a dinner to which the Third Assistant Secretary of

State and the Military Attaché of the Danish Embassy had accepted invitations. "I mean, what can I say that will do any good?"

"Just be your own sweet self," Ralph assured her, for he had by this time permitted himself a distinctly tender tone in addressing her. "And leave the rest to me."

He always took care to be seen exchanging a few quiet words with these official guests. Their remarks had to do with the weather and other minor matters, and neither the Third Assistant Secretary of State nor the Military Attaché had the slightest influence upon the appointment of an ambassador, but Mrs. Bledsoe was properly impressed by their high-sounding titles and by Ralph's gravely confidential manner toward them.

The appointment of an Ambassador to Denmark was delayed by reason of the fact that the President was absorbed in weightier matters. The winter came to an end and the pale green fire of spring burned restlessly through the forest of Washington's parks and streets.

Mrs. Bledsoe no longer seemed so eager about her European career as she had been at first. She and Ralph had found it necessary to confer a great many times in a confidential manner about their plans. Almost everything had been done now that could be done, but he still went to the Bledsoe house twice a week to discuss the matter with his fair employer.

He always made his call about the middle of the afternoon. The General at that time was always at his club, for he was fortunately a man of unvarying habits. Callers would never come until much later, and Ralph usually left before any of them arrived. He observed, after the first few weeks, that the coloured butler no longer admitted him.

Mrs. Bledsoe herself would open the door and she would often do it before he could touch the bell, having observed his approach through the window.

Ralph observed that her manner in greeting him was becoming more and more eager, and he understood well enough the great advantage he held over her. She was a restless princess imprisoned in the tower of a torturing marriage and he was evidently the only young knight who had gained access to it. But his manner was discretion itself. He did not intend to risk any breach or scandal for the excellent reason that money was involved and money was always more important than love.

A like timidity sat uncomfortably upon Mrs. Bledsoe, for she too had a great deal to lose. Both of them pretended desperately that they had something really important to talk about, but in spite of their best efforts the conversation would die and they would sit looking at each other. Mrs. Bledsoe would smile and drop her eyes, and then, when the suspense seemed to be getting unendurable, one of them would think of something to say.

At first they always sat facing each other on a couple of the General's huge upholstered armchairs, but one day it became necessary for them to sit side by side on a settee so that they could look over a newspaper together. Mrs. Bledsoe moved about restlessly in her seat now and then as though she were not comfortable. Their knees came together and stuck as though they had possessed some adhesive quality. Both of them were intensely conscious of the contact, and both of them talked energetically about nothing. She nervously dropped a pencil in her lap and both of them reached for it. His hand fell upon hers. She did not take it away. They sat silent for several min-

utes, during which a heavy suspense seemed to gather about them. Her bosom rose and fell perceptibly and her lips were parted. Ralph bent and kissed them lightly with a sense of hazard.

"No!" she gasped, but without moving. "No. . . . You mustn't . . . I . . . I . . . think you had better go now. . . ."

She was painfully disturbed. Ralph had no desire to provoke an explosion just then. It was nearly time for the General to come home. He rose and walked to the door. She followed him. He turned and looked into her eyes, gravely, passionately.

"Martha!" It was the first time he had used her given name, and he brought it out with breathless tenderness. "Martha, forgive me! I couldn't help it!"

She lifted one hand to a presumably fevered brow and graciously extended him the other one. He bent over it and kissed it. Then he went out and down the steps slowly, with his hat in his hand and his eyes upon the ground, like a man crushed by a great and thwarted emotion. When he got around the corner he threw back his head and exploded into a laugh of relief and triumph.

4

A few days later the appointment of General Joseph P. Bledsoe as Ambassador to Denmark was announced. Ralph 'phoned Mrs. Bledsoe the news and then called upon her to present his congratulations.

She greeted him graciously but appeared ill-at-ease and confused, as one is apt to be when a prize long desired falls suddenly in one's lap.

"When do you think you will leave?" Ralph asked, put-

ting all the anxious feeling he could into the query.

"I don't know," she answered. "Before long, I guess. He said we would leave as soon as possible, so that we can go to Paris first."

"What a wonderful trip you will have!"

"Yes, I'm glad." Her tone lacked conviction. "The General is coming home early today," she added irrelevantly. "About three-thirty or four o'clock, he said . . . that is, if it doesn't rain. He never stirs out in the rain because it brings on his rheumatism. . . . He has so many letters to write and all, you know. . . ."

"Perhaps I had better go, if you expect to be busy, and come some other time," Ralph suggested.

"No. Don't go yet," she requested nervously. "Sit down. I want to thank you . . . I almost forgot. I know we owe it all to you."

"I'm glad for your sake that I succeeded," Ralph replied modestly. "But not for my own."

They were sitting side by side on the little settee again. Again conversation had fallen dead between them.

"Martha!" He breathed her name softly, and laid a gentle hand upon hers. But the formula seemed not to work this time.

"Please don't touch me," she requested, a bit breathless, looking straight ahead.

They sat stupidly, uncomfortably silent. Their discomfort was intensified by the weather, for it was one of those sultry days in late spring, which are among the most trying phenomena of Washington's climate. The sky was heavily clouded so that the General's curtained reception room was almost as dark as ordinarily it would have been at twilight. It was hot and incredibly still. Not the faintest rustle of air disturbed the great elms that arched the street.

Now and then a quiver of ghostly green lightning lit the room for an instant. Distant thunders rumbled. The air had a quality of almost unendurable suspense.

Martha turned restlessly in her seat and looked out the window.

"Isn't this awful!" she exclaimed. "If it would only rain!"

"Yes," Ralph agreed, laboriously trying to sustain conversation. "It would be a great relief."

Just then a terrific crash of thunder shattered the silence.

Martha whirled around spasmodically, seized Ralph's coat in both hands and buried her head against it.

"O-o-o-oh!" she shuddered. "I'm so horribly afraid of thunder!"

Ralph put his arms around her protectively.

The storm burst as suddenly as the discharge of a gun. Wind roared through the trees, tearing off whole branches, driving before it a heavy down-pour of rain that blurred everything into a grey obscurity, while thunder continued a booming accompaniment. Martha, it seemed, was helpless with terror. She paid no heed to his kisses, but sank back upon the settee with her eyes closed, limp and unresisting.

The storm reached a roaring rhythmic climax and then suddenly subsided.

They sat up and looked at each other, smiling sheepishly.

"You're a bad boy," she told him tenderly. "To take advantage of me when I was absolutely paralyzed with fright. Now go and sit over there."

5

The General came in soon after the rain was over. He

greeted Ralph kindly, accepted his congratulations and offered him a cigar.

"That was a splendid little shower we had, wasn't it?" he remarked genially.

"It surely was," Ralph agreed.

Martha was leaning back in luxurious languor upon the settee, her eyes half closed, a mild beatific smile upon her lips.

"Yes," she murmured. "It was a great relief!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I

The American people had entered the war. But the American people did not seem to know it. The people were apathetic, uninterested, almost incredulous.

Could this huge, seemingly inert thing be hitched to a desperate purpose? Could it be made to smell blood and lust for combat?

All over the country men began shouting from stages, pulpits, rostrums, platforms, automobiles parked at the curb. They shouted over and over again the same words —patriotism and hatred. Hate and serve. Every little man who yearned to stand up before his fellows and make a noise had found an opportunity. He had found a mission and a message ready-made. The voices of the four-minute men resounded in a thousand halls, like an endless echo, all saying the same thing with a slightly different inflection. The newspapers and the magazines took up the cry. Hate and serve. Hate or be hated. Serve or be damned. The People began to move. It began to yell. Hurrah for the war! Let's hang the kaiser!

The war was on—a potent pervasive spirit working variously for various men. To those who held the power of property it was a shower of blood that nourished the gardens where money grows, bringing forth huge crops almost overnight. For some it was a great moral crusade, suddenly making murder holy in the light of a beautiful dream.

For some it was misery and horror and madness. But for many it was a sudden release. It filled the air with an exotic excitement which all must feel, which was specific and potent as a drug. It dissolved in a moment bonds that had held for years. Men who had never kicked a cat suddenly lusted for the feel of weapons in their hands. Quiet citizens of good repute began buying bootleg liquor and seducing their stenographers. Dignified married ladies dashed away from home and children to make the boys in khaki happy. Careful, proper little girls who had cautiously hunted husbands for years suddenly flung themselves into the arms of soldiers. A million living images of God were shattered and in their places stood a million two-legged mammals of a wandering, lusting, fighting breed. For a million victims of the dull and complicated bondage known as civilization life had suddenly become joyful, savage, hot and hazardous.

In Washington, perhaps, this orgiastic quality of war attained its highest intensity. There were neither the restraints of the military camps nor the horrors of the front. There were thousands of girls renegade from home, and as many youths with sudden death before them and all their hopes behind. Despite war-time prohibition, liquor abounded and money seemed to fall upon the place in a golden shower. The city had the air of a carnival—not the gay and graceful carnival of a people that makes of life an art, but the passionate, brutal carnival of a people to whom life is a discipline that has suddenly cracked—a carnival of jazz and shimmy, of hootch and lust. . . A carnival with hatred for its motto and greed for its queen.

Carnival by night, and by day a prodigious display of energy—energy half organized, wasteful, almost running

amuck, but none-the-less moving mightily to its purpose of a million men across the sea.

Washington, dull, sleepy Washington, the butt of foreign ridicule, the joke-capital of the world, had become one of the busiest spots on earth. Its streets thronged and thundered with traffic. Its sidewalks blazed with uniforms and with the pretty frocks that follow them. Waiting lines formed in its cafés. In its hotels guests slept in bathtubs and on cots in the hallways. The corridors of its department buildings were crowded with patriots who wanted jobs and contracts. Down in Potomac Park, lawns and tennis courts were being buried under acres of new buildings to house new departments. Under the urge of war, government grew like a gourd in the sun.

Everybody was coming to Washington. Big Business, which had always been content to operate the government by political proxy, now came to operate it in person. Society, which had always sniffed at Washington, came to see that Big Business had a good time. The intellectuals came to lay their brains at the feet of government. Novelists, poets and humorists wrote propaganda. Socialists suddenly saw war as a way to the millenium. Pacifists preached murder as the price of peace. Ecclesiastics wept for blood in the name of Jesus. Every one seemed a little mad and all the maddest came to Washington.

2

Ralph had no doubt or hesitation about his proper relation to the national cataclysm. He was determined to serve his country and to serve it in some non-combative and remunerative capacity. To this end he had been working in a quiet intelligent way ever since the entry of the United States into the war had seemed probable. He had gone to

all of the prominent persons whom he had favoured as a newspaperman and a lobbyist and had let them know of his desire to serve in some way that would give play to his talents.

It was his old friend, Senator Thomas Jefferson Wells, who gave him most substantial help. Ralph had given Wells much desirable publicity, and Wells was not the man to forget such favours. Now a political friend of Wells had just been appointed to a high place in the service of the American Red Cross. His name was Col. James Randolph Bleason. He hailed originally from Arkansas, where he had begun his career as the publisher of a small country newspaper. Gradually he had acquired a string of newspapers in small towns, from which he had made a substantial fortune. He was known as a man of political ambitions which had never been fulfilled. He was a great maker of speeches. He had been especially active in gathering funds for the Red Cross. In recognition of these services he had been given an important executive position with offices in the Red Cross Building in Washington and a salary of nine thousand dollars a year.

"What Colonel Bleason wants is a competent assistant who knows the ropes in Washington to take care of the publicity of his office," Senator Wells explained to Ralph. "I don't know of any one who is better qualified for the job than you are. The Colonel has been abroad making a study of the situation in the Allied countries. He is expected in Washington this evening. If you are interested, I will make an appointment with him."

Ralph was interested and the interview was arranged by wire. The Colonel's train was late, so that Ralph and Senator Wells had to wait for him nearly an hour in the lobby of the hotel. Bleason was expected, not only by them

but also by the management of the hotel, the Colonel having cabled from Paris for a reservation of a suite of rooms.

When the Colonel entered, every one in the crowded lobby must have known that a man of the first importance had arrived. He was preceded by two bell-boys and the driver of his cab, all bearing luggage heavily plastered with new foreign stickers. The Colonel himself followed these menials at a slight interval, carrying a large umbrella. His bearing was dignified and yet without a trace of self-consciousness. He was a gentleman of considerable bulk, yet not fat enough to be ridiculous. He wore a light yellow reefer, a rather large derby hat, and a pince-nez with a wide black ribbon attached. His most striking features were a large grey moustache and a nose of Roman design and rich sclerotic colouring. The mere mention of his name at the desk brought forth a profusion of polite greeting and of mail. He next visited both of the telegraph booths in the lobby and received communications which he read at a glance and stuffed into his overcoat pockets.

Permitting himself a glance about the lobby for the first time, he perceived Senator Wells. The Senator rose and the two met with a cordial greeting in the middle of the floor. All eyes were upon them. It was a delight to see how easily and naturally these two great men caught the regard of whatever public might be within reach.

For all his dignity, his ineffable air of importance, there was nothing pompous about the Colonel. He was in this regard far more subtle than Senator Wells. The Senator advanced, as always, with a perceptible strut, teasing his forked whiskers with a restless forefinger, throwing a glance to his gallery now and then.

"My dear Colonel Bleason!" he exclaimed with a rich rotundity of utterance.

"Well, by Golly!" responded the Colonel. "My old friend Wells. How's every little thing?"

A homely, slangy, easy-going cordiality was the note he affected.

"Here is a young man, who, I believe, can be of the greatest use to you, Colonel," said the Senator as he presented Ralph.

"He's the man I want to talk to, then," the Colonel responded heartily.

"Boys, it's a great work we've got to do over there!" he went on, looking from one to the other of them with owlish earnestness. "You have no idea. . . . As Arthur Balfour said to me, 'Bleason' he said, 'without America's help, civilization is lost.' . . . I've looked over the ground and now I want to get organized and get to work. Wait till I register and we'll go up to my room and talk it over."

In his room the Colonel produced a quart bottle of excellent whiskey and a large box of cigars. A bell-boy brought ginger ale, ice water and glasses. The conversation was punctuated at intervals of about five minutes by the Colonel's unvarying invitation.

"Have another little drink, boys."

The talk at first was slow and perfunctory, with much puffing of cigars between remarks. Colonel Bleason asked Ralph a few questions about his experience, and invited him to call at the Red Cross Building the next day.

As the whiskey began to work the interview resolved itself into a hot conversational conflict between Wells and Bleason, each of them trying to unburden his heart of great emotions. By the time the quart was half gone, the Colonel had the floor all to himself. He was less polite than the Senator, interrupting him without mercy, and his use of the language was far more direct and agile. His brief

and energetic sentences seemed to cut the Senator's polysyllabic profundities all to pieces before they could get under way, so that Wells finally gave it up.

With all the inhibitions of prudence and modesty dissolved by liquor, and with no one to interrupt or to contradict him, the Colonel talked freely of many things. In effect he dumped out the contents of his mind before his hearers, as one might empty a long-neglected waste-basket, revealing a vast confusion of unrelated things.

He gave them a brief outline of his career, telling of his early life of poverty in a little Arkansas town, when he had supported his aged mother by blacking boots, running errands and mowing lawns.

"By God, boys!" he told them, wiping a boozy tear from his eye, "she was the most wonderful mother in the world. There never was, there never will be another woman like her."

He described briefly and vividly his rise in life—how he had become a reporter on a country weekly, saved his money and bought it, made it a daily, acquired other dailies. Wealth and power had come to him. He had made legislators and governors. He had become a national committeeman. To him, as to so many self-made men, his own career was the most wonderful romance in the world. He seemed to believe firmly in his own greatness and importance. He contemplated himself with astonishment and admiration.

"I don't want to boast, boys. For a man of national—and, now—international reputation, I'm modest. I don't give myself much credit for what I've done. I give the credit to this glorious country of ours—the country of free democratic institutions and equal opportunity. It's the most wonderful country on earth. And now it's in danger. Democracy is in danger. Freedom is in danger. And it's

all due to the ruthless ambition of one man—the Emperor of Germany. Boys, this war will not be over until the Kaiser is hanged!"

The Colonel brought his fist down upon the table with such force that the cigars jumped in their box and the whiskey trembled in its bottle. He glared from one to the other of his hearers with an expression of blinking, tearful ferocity. They nodded their heads in perfect agreement with lurching drunken solemnity.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I

At Red Cross headquarters Ralph found himself in an atmosphere of intense patriotic activity. It seemed as though every available bit of space in the building was already occupied and yet new employés were being added almost daily. The scene was a gay one, for there were many pretty girls, and many young men from the great eastern colleges who seemed to find a special welcome here and to feel that they could serve their country far better in the Red Cross than in the Army.

The Departments of Civilian and Military Relief were the busiest offices in the building. They were headquarters for the volunteer workers—the important ladies, nattily knickerbockered, who organized entertainments to make soldiers happy, served coffee and sandwiches at railroad stations, sold yarn to knitters, visited wives and families of soldiers, strove to save the souls of girl war workers.

Ralph was connected with that part of the organization which had to do with work abroad, and he was pleased to find that this was not so busy. It appeared that the commissioners to the various allied countries were inclined to act largely upon their own discretion, and to regard the home office chiefly as an agency for raising funds.

This was fortunate for Ralph because he was engaged in various activities on his own account which took a large part of his time. Although he had severed his connection

with the National Commercial Association, he still retained an informal working partnership with Colonel Melvane. Melvane had always maintained a lucrative private practice in obtaining advance information and special dispensations for clients who were willing and able to pay.

There is always, in Washington files and pigeonholes, information which is worth thousands, sometimes millions, to persons who know how to get it and use it. An accurate forecast of a decision of the Supreme Court, or of the Agricultural Department's estimate of the cotton crop, or of a report of the House Committee on Public Lands, or of a note to Mexico by the Secretary of State may often be coined into money on the stock market. Then, too, there are administrative favours of considerable cash value, such as favourable action on immigration cases or those involving riparian rights controlled by the War Department.

Much of this information and some of these administrative opportunities are controlled by persons not wholly inaccessible. A girl stenographer has been known to win a fortune for her lover by making an extra carbon copy of a letter dictated by an assistant cabinet officer. A clerk engaged in compiling a report on the condition of crops once went to his window and pulled the blind down four inches. A man sitting in a house across the street turned to a telephone and spoke to New York. This simple operation was worth several hundred thousand dollars to his principals.

Colonel Melvane, who knew an incredible number of persons in Washington, who had a special gift for finding corruptible persons, and who had a measure of control over a few congressmen, was able to work this gold-mine of illicit information and favour to great advantage. Ralph had repeatedly aided him, and the two now found that the war had opened new opportunities to them. It had created

two great demands—for exemption from active service in the army, and for permits to withdraw whiskey from bonded warehouses. Many of Melvane's connections were useful in obtaining these dispensations, and especially his connection with congressmen such as Green and Polter. Ralph merely acted as a scout in the discovery of opportunities. He was especially successful in finding wealthy fathers of sons who must be saved from the firing line at any cost, for such men nearly always came to the Red Cross seeking places of safety for their boys. If they were disappointed there, as most of them had to be, Ralph would adroitly offer a suggestion, and later Melvane would pay him a commission. It gave him a keen thrill of power to make money in this effortless secretive fashion.

3

In the course of a few weeks he found that his place in the Red Cross was not such a sinecure as he had at first believed. He was in charge of publicity in his department, with the result that he rapidly became a personal press agent for Colonel Bleason. And the Colonel had an almost morbid appetite for publicity. It was not that he desired to advertise himself in order to make more money. His fortune was already made. But he seemed to feel that his personality and achievements had never been adequately put before the world. Full of high motives and ideals, he had a great yearning to be appreciated and understood. All his life he had cherished every scrap of paper upon which his name had been printed, and some newspaper articles about him and by him he had even caused to be framed under glass and hung on the walls of his apartment.

So, although he was able to do little about the opera-

tions of the Red Cross in foreign countries, he found a great deal to say about them to the press. All of his announcements and interviews were written by Ralph and by him distributed to all of the Washington correspondents and all of the press associations. It also devolved upon him to see that the Colonel's social adventures were duly noticed in the society columns.

Worse yet, the Colonel was always making speeches. He found that Ralph had a gift for mellifluous phrase, and he frequently employed his young assistant to write him a good after-dinner address or a four-minute speech to be delivered in Keith's theatre. His love of public speaking for its own sake was almost a mania. He never refused an invitation to speak unless compelled to do so. He would address any gathering on any subject at any length. A man with such a pressing need for public communication, and so little to communicate, must surely have perished in any country less tolerant of the speech-maker than is America. For it seemed to matter little to the Colonel what he said, so long as the sentiments were indubitably proper and euphoniously expressed. He not only used Ralph's contributions with pleasure, but he also drew freely upon joke books and cribbed resounding phrases from the great American orations of the past. Yet he toiled over these patchwork compositions with love and creative ardour, turning a phrase this way and that, calculating pauses and climaxes. Usually he did invent one or two apt and homely metaphors, with the flavour of Arkansas about them, so that in some sense he impressed his personality on his material after all. He would often read his finished product aloud to Ralph.

"I bet that'll get a hand!" he would exclaim when he came to one of these original lines.

Ralph, who was both amused and annoyed by his patron's addiction to public utterance, went to hear one of the speeches he had written, and found that the Colonel, like Demosthenes, fought against heavy natural handicaps as an orator. Not only was he singularly free of ideas which might have impelled him to expression, but he was without aptitude for delivering those of others. He had a carefully cultivated platform manner of nonchalant good-nature, but it evidently covered an intense self-consciousness, for he nearly always forgot a part of what he had so carefully memorized. His voice was high and flat, with a sort of quack about it. He had none of the sonorous fury of the born mob-master. He merely stood up and hesitantly repeated his little composition of platitudes and old jokes, reminding one of nothing so much as of a schoolboy speaking his piece on commencement day.

Yet this singular exercise gave him the greatest pleasure he knew. Applause warmed him like wine and kept him happy for days. There was in him some imperative need for lifting up his voice before his fellows—a need as primitive and unaccountable and almost as inarticulate as that which inspires a dog in the presence of a full moon.

3

In accordance with that tradition of high mutual appreciation which obtains among successful men in this country, Colonel Bleason had often been described by his friends as a man of genius. If there was little in his record of actual achievement to justify the term, it was none-the-less true that he had many of the qualities which are associated in the popular mind with genius, and especially with genius young and undeveloped. He was erratic and excitable, subject to bursts of enthusiasm followed by spells of depres-

sion, in which he was wont to seek those traditional comforters of the weary intellect—woman and alcohol. He was always either shaken by an almost hysterical energy which seemed never quite to find its goal, or else overwhelmed by melancholy which almost paralyzed his will. In spite of his fifty years, his character was that of a gifted and sensitive youth who has not yet found his place in the world.

"I'm a temperamental fellow, Ralph," he admitted to his young assistant one day. "You'll just have to put up with me."

His tone was deprecatory but there was a touch of pride in it too.

Ralph found that he had indeed a good deal to put up with, for he seemed necessary to his patron both in the expansive and in the depressive phases of his turbulent existence.

The Colonel was what is known in the newspaper world as an "idea man." He did not work systematically, but was subject to sudden inspirations. When his energy was on the rise his fecundity in ideas was astonishing. He had ideas about the management of the Red Cross, ideas for speeches, ideas about raising money. And all of his own ideas filled him with an enthusiasm so intense that it was almost painful. He was always calling conferences to talk things over. The greater the number of persons who attended these gatherings, the better the Colonel liked them. He did all of the talking.

Many of his ideas were genuinely good, especially those which had to do with methods of raising money and of advertising the work of the Red Cross, but he was apt to spend so much time talking about them that little was done. Often Ralph, after listening to his chief all day, had to

return to the office at night to write the necessary letters and articles. Sometimes the whole office force was kept at work fourteen hours.

The Colonel was something of a tyrant at such times, but he was a benevolent one. Nothing displeased him except to be contradicted or interrupted when talking, and as all of his assistants were dependent upon him for their places, these things seldom occurred. A man who had some ideas of his own which he could not refrain from expressing, and a girl stenographer who found the Colonel's personal feud with the Kaiser a subject for untimely giggles, were suddenly eliminated from his staff. Ralph was quick to see that his most indispensable work was to listen to the Colonel deferentially and at regular intervals to nod his head and say, "Yes!" He was perfectly willing to do this.

In his expansive phase the Colonel, though somtimes a bore, was on the whole admirable and had even some genuine charm. He was urbane, good-natured and witty. If he occasionally became tedious on the subject of the war, he also told excellent funny stories, and he showed a real gift for the use of metaphor. He went about the office encouraging and flattering his employés. Often he took whole bevies of stenographers out to lunch. He had a marked aptitude for the management of women, whom he greatly preferred to men as employés. He liked to pat the girls on the head or shoulder in a fatherly way, sometimes even putting an arm about one of them. He was adroit in judging just how far he could safely carry this attitude of disinterested affection.

When the Colonel was at his best it was easy to see in action the qualities that had enabled him to succeed as an editor and publisher—his astonishing intuitive ability to understand and cater to the popular mind, his gift for man-

aging simple people and attaching them to him, his resourcefulness and nervous energy. Had his endurance been equal to this brilliance he would surely have become a great power, but his energy always exhausted itself in a week or two. He would begin coming to the office late. He would become morose and irritable. It seemed impossible for him to make up his mind about anything, and impossible for any one to please him. He quarrelled with his assistants, often making his personal stenographer weep. He seemed to have spent his energy without achieving the sense of fulfilment that follows work well done. Inevitably a day would come when he did not appear at the office at all.

Ralph at first hoped this might mean a spell of rest and freedom for him, but he soon learned that he was mistaken. If not that day, then the next the Colonel would call him up.

"Come over to my apartment when you get through with your work," he would order. "I want to have a talk with you about that Roumanian matter."

Ralph would find the Colonel in the sitting room of his apartment, usually striding up and down the floor with a cigar in his mouth, while a bottle of whiskey and glasses stood on the table.

"Have a drink," the Colonel would invite, and he would have another one himself. Then he would begin to talk, but never about Roumania. His invariable subject was himself, his disappointments and frustrations. At times he would assure Ralph earnestly that he, Bleason, should have been a statesman and an orator. Lack of education, the necessity for making money, were the things that had kept him from it. He seemed firmly to believe that if he had but learned more out of books when he was a little boy,

he might have swayed multitudes and occupied high elective offices.

At other times literature was the jade that had jilted him.

"I ought to write, that's what I ought to do," he would assert. And he would go on to tell of great editorials he had written, of famous men who had flattered him on his style. He had always had plenty of ideas and especially of ideas for plays. It was lack of time that prevented him from working them out. First his business had taken all of his energy, and now his country needed him and he could not disregard her in her hour of need.

He made it plain to Ralph that he regarded himself as one who had a just grievance against life and the world. He had been a citizen of the utmost diligence, virtue and rectitude. He was a patriot and a philanthropist. And yet life had denied him the fulfilment of all his dearest wishes. As he uttered his plaint, tears of honest self-pity would start to his eyes. In his love and compassion for himself he was terribly sincere.

At such times he hated to be left alone. He would cling to his young assistant as the ancient mariner did to the wedding guest, detaining him always for one word more, urging him to have another drink, begging him to stay all night. Ralph was amazed to discover that this man, so splendidly self-assured and important in his public character was in private a child, bewildered, afraid of the dark.

Ralph found that his own relation to Bleason became more and more burdensome. He had now not one job, but three of them. He was not only a press agent and a listener, but also a caretaker. When the Colonel was far gone in liquor, it was Ralph who must put him to bed, and Ralph

who must bring him a bromo-seltzer in the morning and and take him for a drive in the park. The Colonel had an enormous capacity and need for companionship and attention. His curiously incomplete personality could no more stand alone than can a chair that has lost a leg. A childless widower of some years standing he seemed to be wholly without close family connections. His life was a long, groping search for some one upon whom he could lean for comfort and flattery. He kept a sort of perpetual open house in his apartment and dispensed great quantities of liquor. This naturally brought him much company of a sort. Young men about town knew his place as one where they could drop in and get a drink almost any time. But when he sought to open his heart to them they were wont to get up and go away, leaving him sitting sad and drunk beside an empty bottle.

For Ralph there was no escape from the Colonel's exactions and he knew it. His position in the Red Cross was an excellent one. It paid him six thousand dollars a year and exempted him from active service. He was determined to hold it until the end of the war. He therefore endured the Colonel as a necessary and incomprehensible evil.

Bleason was a mystery to him, but not one about which he was inclined to speculate. In his own mind he considered the man sufficiently accounted for when he had applied to him that amused and disdainful term which in America is the epitaph over starved and blasted aspirations, the summary and dismissal of a million failures. . . . He decided the Colonel was a "nut" and let it go at that.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I

That first summer of the war was a gay and exciting one in Washington, and both the Colonel and Ralph bore a gallant part in the festivities. The city swarmed with fair war-workers and Bleason felt, as he told Ralph, that he should do what he could to make them happy. When his mood of elevation was upon him he gave parties in his flat, to all of which Ralph was bidden, along with other young men about Red Cross headquarters and an assortment of the women who had come to Washington for the sake of the Cause. A fine freedom of speech and conduct prevailed at these gatherings. Those who desired to do so could stay sober and any one who wished could easily get drunk. The Colonel had a phonograph and by pushing the rugs and chairs out of the way, his front room could be used for dancing. There were two other rooms and a bath and the guests had the run of the whole place. A discreetly closed door was always treated with the respect it deserved.

Ralph enjoyed these little gatherings, although for the most part he was unable to share the Colonel's taste in women. Bleason had a curious liking for middle-aged married ladies and widows of rather heavy construction—billowy women with thick ankles who fox-trotted ponderously. But there was one girl among Bleason's regular guests who afforded Ralph great amusement. Her name was Alice Bodey and she was a stenographer at Red Cross

headquarters. Alice was a tall, powerful lass about nineteen years old. She had a good figure, though somwhat big-boned and heavy-footed. Her face was pretty and good-natured with a sprinkling of freckles across the nose. She was a pioneer in the bobbed-hair and rolled-stocking movement. Her thick blond locks were frilled out to the size of a peck basket, and her frolicsome movements frequently revealed a substantial but well-turned pair of bare knees. She smoked cigarettes incessantly often lighting one off the stump of another, inhaling the smoke deeply and blowing it out in huge vaporous clouds. She drank whiskey as a child takes castor oil, with a splutter and a gasp, but her reward for this suffering was rich and almost instantaneous. Given one drink, she became a sprite of carnival. She would advance to the middle of the floor, snapping her fingers, wriggling her shoulders, making her generous and uncorseted bosom jump and shiver.

"Come on!" she would demand. "Who's going to dance with me? I've just got to dance!"

If no one responded to the challenge immediately, she would dance alone, doing a crude medley of all the stage dances she had ever seen. She bounced around the floor, swayed her hips, spun on one toe so that her skirts opened like an umbrella, crouched and rose with a serpentine weaving of her long sinewy arms. She was far too heavy for such gambols, but her performance was saved from being wholly ridiculous by the passionate abandon and energy she put into it. She was clumsy but the spirit of play and the joy of life were in her. She was always applauded and *encored* until she subsided in a swirl of skirts, flushed and laughing, almost beautiful.

Alice had smiled warmly upon Ralph several times at the Red Cross offices, and one night when she danced in Blea-

son's apartment she looked at him again and again, courting him openly with her eyes and with all her wiggles and palpitations. When she had done she flounced down beside him, took a freshly lighted cigarette from his fingers and inhaled and discharged a great cloud of smoke with a luxurious sigh.

"You might give me a puff of it," he protested in mock dudgeon.

She promptly drew another mouthful, with a swift movement pressed her lips against his, and softly breathed him full of smoke. It was a curious caress, at once brazen and gentle, crude and tender. It intrigued his fancy. . . . Over her shoulders his eyes met the eyes of Colonel Bleason, who was watching them intently. He looked away immediately, but Ralph had caught a peculiarly unpleasant expression. He had not suspected that the Colonel was interested in Alice, but now he knew that such was the case.

In this situation he did not hesitate for a moment. At the first opportunity he moved away from Alice and stayed away from her for the rest of the evening. He had long since learned the lesson that love and business must not be mixed. He liked Alice, but to let a mere love affair impair his standing with the Colonel would have seemed sheer madness to him. From that day he made a practice of pointedly neglecting Alice.

The girl at first seemed piqued, but in a few weeks she seemed to have forgotten all about her scorned advance. She treated him with the casual friendliness of a woman whose interest is centred in some one else. Gradually Ralph came to realize that the some one else was Bleason. The fact seemed incredible to Ralph, but evidence rapidly accumulated that the Colonel and Alice were in love. Bleason was much inclined to talk about the girl. His eyes followed

her about the office. She was often seen in his car. She was his personal stenographer now, took his notes with worshipful attention, and listened with wondering admiration to his long harangues.

"I think he's simply great!" she told Ralph one day when the Colonel had been called away in the midst of a discourse on the perils of Bolshevism which they had both been permitted to hear. "He's so intellectual!"

"Yes, he's a great man," Ralph agreed.

2

Ralph, who had never before witnessed the infatuation of a young girl for an elderly man, found it hard to imagine what attracted Alice to the Colonel, and he also knew that she was not the type of woman who usually interested Bleason. He had enjoyed unusual opportunities for observing the Colonel's amours, and the latter had also expounded his philosophy of love to his assistant at great length, for after his seventh drink the Colonel was almost sure to abandon international politics for the subject of women.

To the Colonel there were but two perfect women and both of them were dead—his wife and his mother. These two his memory had canonized. They were saints and constituted an unapproachable ideal of perfection. He could seldom speak of either of them, especially when in liquor, without shedding a gentle tear. For all other women, and especially for those who favoured him, he affected a great contempt. He made a great many conquests, too, among women of a certain type. Most of his loves were neither young nor beautiful, but they were always women of some respectability. Lonely widows and neglected wives were his specialty. For these he had perfected an unctuous emotional appeal. He always put himself forward as a

solitary and disappointed man—one who had achieved great worldly success and found it inadequate. His heart was empty. He craved a portion of the simple happiness which only a sweet woman could give. Often he would tell the object of his attentions that she reminded him of his mother or of his wife, and in truth he was probably sincere in this. His uniform preference for respectable-looking ladies near middle-age suggested that the recollection of those two perfect women guided him in his choice. And for a time he would treat each new love with all the reverence and consideration she could ask. But as soon as she responded his whole attitude changed. He would summon her by telephone, dismiss her abruptly, neglect her and desert her as soon as a new affinity appeared. He took just as much pride in his contemptuous treatment of woman living as he did in his reverence for woman dead. He had always half-a-dozen or so sad-eyed, reproachful ladies in his train, and he often boasted about them. It gave him a sense of power and importance to feel that he was the object of much disappointed affection.

His pursuit of Alice Bodey was a departure from custom for the Colonel, but Ralph was not long in discovering the secret of her appeal to him. It was a matter of gossip in the circle of free-lances which gathered at the Colonel's flat that Alice, for all her wild ways, was a very good girl.

Alice was a native of a small town in Ohio, and her life up to the time of the war had been the careful and restricted one which custom and circumstances impose upon most girls in small, American towns. She had answered her country's call in defiance of her family, and in Washington as a war-worker, like thousands of other girls, she had tasted the sweets and perils of freedom for the first time. The swing of reaction against long restraint, the intoxication of a sud-

denly discovered freedom had naturally carried her to extremes of conduct. Her cigarette-smoking, dancing and drinking, her rolled stockings and bobbed hair were all banners of revolt, proudly displayed. In appearance and manner she had undergone a complete and astonishing change. But the satisfaction of the impulse which had been the real, half-understood motive of her revolt, she had been unable to achieve. She had plunged boldly into several flirtations, but when it came to surrender she had always hesitated. It was as though her Puritan upbringing had reached out a long invisible arm and jerked her back each time that she sought to desert it.

A Washington newspaper at that time published a daily department entitled, "Advice for War-workers," and it was one long, racy discussion of how a girl might best protect herself against the levantine temptations of the war-time capital. Alice read it every day with fascinated and irritated interest. It was like a voice from the old home town bidding her beware. It kept reminding her that the most important thing in the world is to be good, and yet, like all moral preachments, it also vicariously but insistently suggested the delights of wickedness. If the temptation is so terrible, how sweet must be the sin! That was the way Alice felt, but she made herself believe that she accepted the viewpoint of "Advice for War-workers."

"I'll be a good girl and have a good time, too," she told herself over and over. But her life remained a quest, the goal of which she feared to find.

The legend of Alice's unassailable rectitude grew and spread by way of each new swain. Of course it had come to the Colonel, who always had an open ear for gossip, and it filled him with admiration.

"Alice is a fine little girl," he told Ralph. "Here she is away from home all by herself and yet she keeps just as straight as a string. All of these Press Club bucks have tried to run away with her and not one has succeeded. She drinks their liquor and smokes their cigarettes and then tells them good night."

The Colonel chuckled with delight and approval. It was not Alice the rebel and adventuress whom he admired, but Alice the salamander, passing unscathed through the flames of war-time Washington. His admiration for her principles was perfectly sincere, and yet it became more and more evident that he was sparing no effort to bedazzle and conquer her himself. The Colonel was a tragic lover of a type as old as Christendom—that seeks inevitably to destroy what it loves, and turns away in contempt from the gift it asks.

Both Alice and the Colonel evidently believed that they were conducting their romance with deep discretion. They did not appear together in cafés and theatres, but went for long and mysterious drives in Rock Creek Park. Yet it seemed that some one they knew always saw them. The office was full of gossip about them of which they seemed wholly unaware. The acuteness of intuition and observation which people in general and women in particular bring to bear upon the love affairs of others is one of the most impressive manifestations of human intelligence. Every stenographer in the Colonel's department could and did tell all about his relations with Alice. When she visited his apartment the fact was duly reported. When she appeared at work red-eyed with tears, there was much confident speculation among them. Her subsequent air of happiness, and the Colonel's tender bearing toward her were

all duly noted. Colonel Bleason plainly believed that he was carrying on a delicate business with the utmost circumspection. In fact it was almost as public as a circus.

3

During that mad first summer of the war Alice was in glory. She became better dressed, she seemed prettier, she danced with a new dash and abandon. Word of her wild ways reached her family and they tried to summon her home. She refused to go and her father formally disowned her. Alice told everybody who would listen all about it.

"He said I could come home now or else I could never enter his door again," she explained to Ralph, "And I wrote him one line: 'Good-bye. I'm sorry.' I am sorry, too, but I wouldn't go back and live in that hick town if they'd give it to me. Besides I've got an aunt that'll help me out if I need it."

The next step in Alice's emancipation was the death of this same aunt who left her several thousand dollars. She promptly resigned her position so that she would not have to rise so early in the morning, and also bought a motor car.

"I might as well enjoy it while it lasts," she said to those who advised prudence. "It isn't enough to live on anyway."

She seemed now to have lost the last of her doubts and hesitations. Her life was ruled by a profound instinct to enjoy while she could and to leave mere sterile wisdom as far behind as possible. She gave many parties now on her own account. They would motor out to some Maryland roadhouse for dinner, preceded by cocktails and followed by more, and come booming back over the country roads, singing and shouting, to invade a roof garden or café and dance until it closed. And then Alice would want to start out again for another ride. The party was never over until

every one else was too tired or too drunk for a new venture. Her own energy seemed inexhaustible and her lust for excitement was never satisfied. She played with violent recklessness, like a child released from long duress in a school room. Night was a great purple and golden fruit out of which she squeezed the last possible drop of joy, as though she feared each night might be the last—as though she had seen death waiting just beyond the beloved moment.

She was a living figure of war-time Washington. Her spirit pervaded it. War at the front might be a pouring out of blood. Here in Washington it was a pouring out of money, love and liquor. Under their triple stimulus life was mad and swift. It had burst ancient bonds and regained something of a still more ancient freedom. Every road-house and café and hotel roof was filled with bright-eyed girls and young men in uniform, dancing, flirting, drinking. Smoky, crowded places they were, racked by the maddening blare and boom of jazz and the high wild laughter of excited women, like the neighing of mares or the screams of wild fowl on a spring night. They reeked of cigarettes and alcohol. There were brawls and fights with eager women looking on delighted. Lithe young bodies pranced and wriggled, locked in each others' arms, cheek to cheek. . . . Walls were forest trees and lights were fires. Jungle rhythms shook and stabbed like primitive desire. The race was young again in a mad moment of escape.

4

They were like locusts singing and mating in September sunlight, just as though winter were a myth. But winter came, cold and wet, with a double population crowded into the city, with shortages of food and fuel—of everything. People stood in freezing lines to buy a bucket of coal or a

pound of sugar. War-workers slept three in a bed in half-heated boarding-houses and sold their silk stockings and jewelry to pay the rent. Then influenza came, killing with incredible suddenness, killing soldiers and girls especially as though it liked the taste of sweet, young bodies best.

The strong turned on the weak and ate them, as wolves do in a hard winter. The profiteer was invented and was cursed by everybody. And the profiteer was almost everyone who had anything to sell. Shelter, food, clothes, fuel, medicine, doctors and nurses became so dear that many died for want of them. Undertaking boomed and the living starved to bury the dead. . . . The war had come to Washington at last.

5

Colonel Bleason was as susceptible to environmental influence as a primrose. During the summer he had blossomed out into a lusty youthfulness. Now he suddenly became old, ill, worried and gloomy. He stuck close to his flat and read all of the advice in the newspapers as to how to avoid influenza. He kept out of crowds and whenever he heard a sneeze he jumped as though some one had shot him. The influenza germ was a monster which his imagination visualized as clearly as though it had been a deadly dragon that lurked just outside his door and dogged him through the streets seeking an opportunity to fasten its deadly fangs upon him.

It became Ralph's painful duty to bear his chief company, and to listen to his endless complaints. The Colonel had a hypochondriacal tendency at all times, and worry and low vitality now brought it out in full force. He had many symptoms of many things. His favourite literature was the popular health talks which are published in newspapers and

magazines. He always imagined that he had whatever disease was described by these writers, and his mind was kept unsettled by the differences and contradictions that he was always discovering in his favourite columns of medical advice.

This worrying about his health was the Colonel's principal occupation now. He paid little attention to business and none at all to his love affairs, except for a certain amount of defensive effort. At night he often locked his door and throttled his telephone with a sock so that his repose would not be disturbed by any of those lonely ladies whom he had comforted in a happier time.

"I can't have these old hens pestering me now," he explained to Ralph. "A girl I picked up last spring was in here the other day trying to tell me that she was my affinity. . . . I had to push her out of the door, almost. I couldn't make her understand that I don't have any affinities of that sort. I've been unfortunate about women, but I'm a man of moral principle. . . ."

The Colonel did not seem clear in his own mind as to what his moral principles were. He did not formulate them. But it was plain enough that for the time being the ideal of strict celibacy completely possessed him. He was perfectly sincere in announcing his allegiance to the moral ideal. His heart, purged by suffering, was as pure as that of a child. He had a capacity quite histrionic for living completely in a mood. When bent on pleasure and well-lined with good liquor he had all the look of an elderly satyr who had lost his horns and part of his hair. His little eyes twinkled and his mouth twisted into a curious three-cornered grin of delight. Now innocence and a gentle melancholy were the motives of his being and his whole face and pose expressed them. His eyes widened and rolled upward in

a pensive way that reminded Ralph of Little Eva going to Heaven in Uncle Tom's Cabin. His long mustachios drooped over a mouth sensitively pursed.

In this mood the Colonel was always retrospective and loved to review his life in its more tender and tragical aspects—his bitter struggles as a barefoot boy, the death of his mother, the death of his wife. He would sigh and wipe away a tear.

"It's been a long, hard struggle, Ralph," he said. "And sometimes I wonder whether it's all been worth while. Character—that's what it takes to live this life. Without character a man would go to pieces. That's what I like about you, Ralph. I know you've got character and I know what it's worth. . . ."

Ralph would nod in sympathy and appreciation, and they would sit silent for a long time, puffing their cigars, the Colonel lost in melancholy meditation, Ralph wondering how soon he could safely leave.

One evening during his indisposition, the Colonel had a mission for Ralph.

"I got a telephone message today," he said, "from some one at the boarding house where Alice Bodey lives. You remember her? She got to be quite a nuisance a while back. Kept calling up when I was sick. I had to hang up the 'phone on her several times. At any rate, this woman says that Alice is sick and wants to see me. I wish you would go down there and see what you can do for her. I'm not in a fit condition to go anywhere. Give her anything she needs. . . ."

The address the Colonel gave him lead Ralph to a typical Washington rooming-house. It stood on a fine broad avenue and was a large three-story house with brownstone steps and brownstone trimmings about the doors and win-

dows. Its door was opened by a negro maid of soiled and sullen appearance. When he asked for Alice Bodey he was informed that she lived in the front basement apartment and was led to the back of the hall where the turning on of a small electric light revealed a curious arrangement of name cards and bells. The maid then left him.

He punched the designated bell several times. As no one appeared he groped his way down a dark stairway and knocked on the door of the front basement apartment. It opened to show him a tall, thin girl in a dressing gown of faded silk with unkempt hair hanging in wisps and strings about her face. He could see behind her a dingy little room, crowded with two bureaus and two beds, several chairs, a rusty gas heater throwing off a pale red glow and a stifling odour. The whole place was in confusion, with beds unmade, clothing piled on chairs and spilling out of bureau drawers, unwashed dishes piled on the table. In spite of the gas heater it was cold and no sunlight reached it through the high, barred basement windows.

The woman's voice was hollow and tired and her words were like a blow in the face.

"Are you the undertaker?" she asked.

"No," Ralph replied after a moment's hesitation caused by the unexpectedness of the question. "I am looking for Alice Bodey."

"She died this morning," the woman's voice seemed casual and uninterested.

"It's strange they didn't tell me so upstairs," said Ralph, who was completely at a loss what to do or say.

"I guess they don't know it yet," the woman told him. "Nearly everybody in this house had the flu and four of them have died in the last three days. All three of us had it in here. Some friends finally came and got Gertrude and

took her home yesterday. I didn't have it so bad. I nursed both of them the best I could. . . ."

"Didn't you have a doctor or a nurse or anything?" Ralph wanted to know.

"You can't get a nurse in this town even if you have money," the woman told him. "And we didn't have any. Of course, all the hospitals are full. A doctor came to the house once a day. But Alice, she died so quick, almost before we knew it. We wanted to notify her folks, but she wouldn't let us. She went upstairs while she was able and called up some guy a couple of times and talked to him once. He must have turned her down cold because she came back and cried. Then she went up to a hundred and three and lost her head and raved for a while and went to sleep and died. And she was stronger than either Gertrude or me. . . . I couldn't believe it. . . . That's her body over there under the sheet, and I sure wish you were the undertaker, because if I stay here much longer I'll go crazy. . . ."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

I

To all the Washington newspapermen who had not been called into service the war had brought unusual prosperity. Writers were scarce and scores of causes needed press agents. Henry Lambert's prediction that the purveying of propaganda would become a great and profitable business had been exactly fulfilled. And Henry, to the great surprise of Ralph, had become one of the most successful press agents in town. Ralph had not enjoyed a long talk with his friend since the day he had met him in the Library, but he had seen abundant evidence that Henry was on the way to wealth. He had been in Henry's office in a down-town building, where he had found the erstwhile philosopher striding up and down with a heavy frown on his face and a heavy cigar in his mouth, dictating a story to a stenographer, while from an adjacent room came the clatter of several typewriters and the rhythmical thump of a mimeograph. Henry was the proprietor and head of a typical war-time publicity office, engaged in raising funds for worthy causes on a percentage basis and in doing publicity work on contract. For the first time since Ralph had known him he was too busy to talk.

"How's business, Henry?" Ralph enquired.

"Pretty good," Henry replied without raising his eyes from the bunch of clippings he held in his hand. "Miss Gaines, give Mr. Dolan a copy of that story we got out last

week about the fall of the Bolsheviki and the nationalization of women. . . . Come in again Ralph." And he went on dictating.

Ralph had also glimpsed Henry driving about the streets in a bright new limousine with his pretty young wife and her baby. He knew that Henry had taken a house on Sixteenth Street, and he had seen the Lambert infant emerge therefrom in the care of a very correct nursemaid with a little lace cap pinned on her head. He had been told that Henry even kept a coloured butler.

"Old Henry turned the trick, all right," was his amazed and admiring reflection. "I didn't think he had it in him."

But his unaccountable and ill-balanced friend had a still greater surprise in store for him. One day he was walking down the Avenue when he saw a man in the uniform of the United States Army sauntering leisurely to meet him, and after a moment of incredulous scrutiny he recognized Henry Lambert.

"Well, for the love of God, Henry!" he exclaimed. "They didn't draft you, did they?"

"No, my progeny saved me from that," Henry told him. "I enlisted. I'm in the Aviation Service now, and I expect to go to a training camp in a few days."

Henry grinned at him broadly. He seemed pleased with himself. His usual air of contemplative and discoursive leisure had returned to him. He pushed his military cap onto the back of his head and started to put his hands in his pockets. Just then an officer came along, whereupon Henry jerked upright and saluted with emphasis.

"But what in all hell did you enlist for?" Ralph demanded.

"Come on over to my house where I won't have to salute every few minutes and I'll tell you about it," Henry invited. "I have a house for a few days yet. My wife has gone back

to her folks in Baltimore and I've canned the servants and the business, all of which is an immense relief."

"But I thought you were making good money out of the business," Ralph remarked in honest bewilderment, as they entered Henry's domicile.

"I was," Henry admitted. "I was taking down more money in a week than I ever did before in a month, but I wasn't getting any of it at that. It all went to pay for this place and for the car and the nursemaid and the nigger door-opener and for having the kid and a lot of other things like that. . . ."

"Why didn't you salt some of it down, if that was what you wanted to do?"

"Too many women," Henry explained curtly. "Not only a wife, but also a mother-in-law, a grand-mother-in-law, and two sisters-in-law. They spent it for me. I didn't have a thing to say about it. I did make some little resistance for a while. I wanted to save money so I could write a book after the war. But when the kid became imminent, it was all off. A woman by herself is a terrible thing to deal with, Ralph, but a woman with a baby, or about to have a baby, is simply irresistible. She's not a rational being. She's a natural force going into action. You might as well reason with a volcano or an earthquake. And she can make it just as unpleasant for you, too. . . ."

"Practically, you're throwing up a good business and going to war to escape your family."

Ralph spoke in a tone of some severity. He felt that the full extent of his folly should be made clear to Henry, but Henry declined to be ashamed of himself. He had the immeasurable self-assurance of a man who is guided by a dominating instinct.

"Put it that way if you want to, Ralph," he replied

blandly. "The family isn't going to suffer. My wife's folks have plenty of money. They can take care of her just as well as I can—probably a darn sight better. I'm attached to her, and to the baby, too. I have all the sympathy in the world for the baby. He and I were both victims of the same accident. He didn't intend to be born and I didn't intend that he should. Now that he's here, I'm going to see that he has a square deal. But for the time being I need a change. In fact, I must have a change or bust. You know Ralph, I've always wanted to write—not a lot of newspaper bunk, but something good. I thought I'd pitch in and make some money, just to show them that I could, and then afterward I would settle down and write. But it wasn't going to work that way. If I hadn't done something desperate I'd have been the slave of this establishment the rest of my life. I'd never have had another day of my own. . . ."

Henry threw himself luxuriously back in his chair and raised a gesticulative hand. Once more he had time to talk.

"That's the trouble with this prosperous and respectable life, Ralph. It's nothing but a bondage. A man gets a nice wife and he works for her the rest of his life. He hires a cook and a maid and he says he has servants, but he works twice as hard for them as they ever work for him. He buys a car, and he may think he is riding in the thing, but he really carries it on his back. A good prosperous American citizen, Ralph, enjoying all the conveniences and luxuries of life, and making his own money as he goes along, is the most complete and abject slave that ever lived. He has a wife and a baby and a home and a car and a bull dog and a boss and cook and a nursemaid, and he works for all of them every day. Of course, most men are born for slavery anyway and wouldn't know what to do with their freedom if

they had it, but for a man with any need or capacity for freedom, it's hell. He survives only by repudiating as many of his obligations as he can. It's all right to be independently rich, Ralph, if you are that fortunate, but if you're not, the only way out is to learn to be independently poor. . . ."

Ralph interrupted, nodding his head.

"There's some sense in what you say, Henry," he conceded. "I never thought it out just that way, but I saw long ago that to marry poor would be a mistake. The thing to do is to marry rich. I'll have all those things—the wife and the car and a lot more—and they won't cost me a cent. You watch me!"

"I've been watching you with envy and admiration for years, Ralph," Henry told him. "Money comes to you just as naturally as ideas come to me. You can smell a dollar a mile away and I can't see one under my nose unless I make a special effort to look for it. You have an acquisitive faculty and I have a creative one. I can't make a pile of money any more than you can write a tragedy in blank verse. Your excellent and shining example is no good to me at all. . . ."

"But what good is it going to do you to go to war and maybe get your neck broken?" Ralph demanded. "You don't think they're going to let you sit down and write poetry over there, do you?"

"No, probably not," Henry admitted. "But at least I get rid of my prosperity. The war, Ralph, is primarily a grand shake-up, for individuals and for nations. That must be its biological function. It's setting a lot of people free from a lot of things. It's a sort of a new deal all around. I want to get in on that new deal, Ralph. I need it. I get rid of my home and my business, at least, and that's something. For the rest, I trust in God."

He grinned.

"Well, good luck to you and be careful," was Ralph's parting advice. "Don't fall out of one of those things."

"I'm not even going up in one if I can help it," Henry assured him. "I think I can get some kind of a clerical job on the ground. . . . Heroism is just as much out of my line as finance."

2

That autumn Ralph had an interview with another old friend of whom he had caught only a few brief glimpses during the past two crowded years. He was afflicted with a touch of lumbago and was told that it could be cured by an osteopath. Remembering that Doc Cooley, his old roommate of the Y. M. C. A., was a practitioner of some such science, he sought Cooley's offices, partly in the hope of getting the stiffness out of his back and partly out of curiosity.

He was admitted by a negro maid dressed in black, with a little white apron and a little white cap, to a waiting room furnished in light wicker with light green curtains at the windows and an imitation Persian rug on the floor. Four women, one of them a pretty flapper, raised their eyes from back numbers of the *National Geographic Magazine* and the *Saturday Evening Post,* gave him a scrutiny of mild interest, and returned to their reading. He saw that he had a long wait before him, but decided to stick it out.

The waiting room was separated from the operating room by a narrow hallway in which was a telephone, and this rang every few minutes. The maid answered it and sometimes made appointments, usually for three or four days ahead. Often the Doctor himself was demanded and his voice, suave and cheerful, could be heard, promising, reassuring, advising. The Doc, Ralph decided, must be making good.

Presently Cooley came in and greeted Ralph warmly.

"Where have you been all these years?" he demanded. "I've caught a glimpse of you once in a while on the street, but that's about all. Too bad the way a fellow loses track of his old friends. I often think of you and of the big times we used to have when we lived in the Y. Say, those were the days! A young fellow never realizes what a good time he's having until he gets all tied up in business and marriage and looks back at it."

The Doc's grin was more aggressive and assured than ever, and he had gained in weight, so that he seemed a larger and more dignified man. His face beamed prosperity and health. If he looked back on his coltish student days with a certain longing, it was none-the-less evident that the present was yielding him no small satisfaction.

"You must come and see me," he told Ralph when the latter's turn on the little padded table came. "I've got a peach of a little bungalow out in Chevy Chase and a peach of a little wife and two kids. I've been meaning to look you up, but I'm just too busy to do anything. . . . My appointment book is full all the time . . . ten hours a day in here. . . . And then I dash out home in the car and put in a little time in the garden and with the wife and kiddies. . . . It's great stuff Ralph. . . . Why haven't you married and settled down?"

Before Ralph could reply the Doc had seized him by both legs and was putting them through a vigorous rotary motion that made Ralph grunt at every twist. The Doc kept it up with heroic endurance for at least three minutes. Then he took a fresh grip and proceeded to double his friend up like a jack knife and open him out again, time after time, while Ralph clung to the board and groaned.

"Say, Doc," he gasped, "you work for your money, don't you?"

"Sure I do," the Doc responded cheerfully. "It takes energy to get that blood moving again. It's kind of stagnant you know. Say, Ralph, you've got three vertebrae out of line, did you know that?"

"The hell I have!" Ralph exclaimed.

"You sure have," the Doc assured him. "And they're all exerting a malignant pressure on the spinal column. Do you ever have any headaches?"

"Well, I do once in a while," Ralph admitted. "But I've always blamed them on this bad hootch we get now."

"It ain't the hootch, its those vertebrae," the Doc told him earnestly. "You want to come around here about once a week and let me work on your backbone. I'll have you all fixed up in six months. And I won't charge you but three dollars a shot. . . . I generally get five."

"Say, Doc," Ralph interposed by way of turning the conversation. "Do you give those pretty girls this same kind of treatment?"

"Sure, I do," said the Doc.

"Pretty soft," Ralph commented. "If you ever need an assistant in an emergency, call me in, will you? I think I could treat 'em for lumbago, all right."

The Doc grinned.

"I've got a two hundred forty pound lady out there waiting for a lumbago treatment now, if you want to take a whirl at her," he suggested.

A little later Ralph was going down the steps with some difficulty, the pain in his back considerably augmented for the time being. He was filled with admiration for his old friend.

"The Doc's making good all right," he reflected. "He'd have sold me that six months' treatment pretty quick if I hadn't shut him off."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I

Mrs. Shorts was giving a farewell dinner party for a few old friends at her apartment in Rockwall Courts. She and her daughter were going to California for the winter.

The stated reason for this departure was that Mrs. Shorts suffered from asthma and did not stand the Washington winter well, but the real and, to Mrs. Shorts, bitter reason was that Gwendolyn's début had not been an unqualified success and neither of the women cared to face the efforts and humiliations of another social season in the capital.

Mrs. Shorts had struggled heroically to realize her ambition of a brilliant marriage for Gwendolyn. Patiently she had angled for fortunes and foreign titles. One young eligible after another she had lured to her apartment, only to have them make a few perfunctory calls and go away again. Gwendolyn had smiled upon them all placidly, and had seen them all depart without showing much regret.

There were only three men who had become regular callers at the Shorts apartment and recognized suitors for Gwendolyn's hand, and all of them were present at dinner that evening.

James Cullen had been one of the mother's second-best hopes. He was an American and had little money, but he came of a very old and honourable southern family, which had owned at one time nearly all of a small town in adjacent Virginia. He still owned there a fine old mansion with a

pillared porch, a collection of family portraits, and several hundred acres of worn-out land growing up in field pine. Besides this establishment there was just enough money left to enable young James Cullen to live a life of melancholy leisure. For he was intensely conscious of himself as the last of a great aristocratic line. He was always looking back with sad longing toward the ante-bellum days when his forefathers had been great tobacco planters and had owned a fleet of schooners plying up and down the Potomac. Georgetown was then one of the greatest ports in America and the name of Cullen had been famous. He believed, and often said, that the vitality of his ancient family had been exhausted, and that his own morose and idle life was the visible and inevitable result of that exhaustion. Moreover he took a curious pride in this rôle of the languid aristocrat. Next to his ancient lineage, his ineffectual and melancholy personality was his greatest distinction in his own eyes, and apparently in the eyes of many others. For he enjoyed great social consideration, and was a special favourite with women. He always told them about the one-time greatness of his family and about the emptiness and unfulfilled longing which haunted his own days. More than once he had brought a fair listener to tears of sympathy. But sympathy was not all that he wanted. A heavy mortgage hung over the Cullen estate, and the woman who was to lift the gloom from his heart must also be able to lift this burden from his ancient house. It was the one thing on earth that he cherished, and his dream was to marry enough money to restore it to its pre-war splendour.

Gwendolyn Shorts had interested him keenly, nor had his interest been wholly mercenary. Her deep, calm vitality had been balm to his febrile and peevish spirit. And his suit had been welcomed and encouraged latterly by Mrs.

Shorts. As her hopes of a title or a fortune dwindled, the idea of allying herself with an old American name and of possessing a Colonial estate became more and more attractive.

But Gwendolyn, passively, imperturbably, had defeated their plans. Because she was untroubled by either ambition or intellect, her instincts were sure and direct.

She knew that what she craved of a man James Cullen did not have. She rejected him as calmly as a cow rejects a handful of excelsior, undeceived by its superficial resemblance to hay. Cullen had told her all about his great traditions and his yearning melancholies. She had listened politely, even sympathetically, and when Cullen laid a hand upon hers, she gently and smilingly removed it.

Cullen had soon given up hope, but he had rather liked himself in the rôle of the hopeless lover, so he had continued coming to the Shorts apartment, drinking tea, gazing at Gwendolyn with sad, thoughtful eyes and telling both of the ladies excellent stories about the great past of his family. He recognized that now this pleasant acquaintanceship was drawing toward an inevitable end and he was full of appropriate words.

"It seems to me there is nothing sadder," he told the assembled company, "than the parting of friends. You ladies have no idea how much I will miss you this winter. Every time I say good-bye to a friend I feel again how little a man has to live for—I mean a man like myself who has neither work nor family to absorb him. I will go back to my great empty house this evening and sit before an open fire, alone. Is there anything more depressing than to sit alone before a hearth fire on an autumn evening? I will probably pull down a volume of Poe—you know Poe is my favourite author—and read 'Ulalume' or 'The Raven.' 'It

was in the brief December, and each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.' . . . That passage haunts me. I read it over and over again. For my house is full of ghosts—ghosts of great men and great days—and they oppress me with a sense of the littleness, the futility of my own life. . . ."

Cullen could talk at any length in this strain and mood and Mrs. Shorts seemed never to tire of hearing him. Her eyes softened and glowed as he spoke. But Gwendolyn confined her attention to her salad, eating with the quiet enthusiasm of one who enjoys food and is not ashamed of the fact.

2

Cullen's successor in the hopes of Mrs. Shorts was a young diplomat named Robert Blackwell. He had neither family nor wealth, but had recently achieved an appointment as ambassador to one of the more important South American countries, and was generally regarded as a man who would inevitably rise in the diplomatic service. His training for the management of international affairs, like that of most American diplomats, had been of a purely practical character. A native of California, he had there acquired a knowledge of Spanish, and had become in the strength of that accomplishment, a salesman of soaps and perfumeries in the West Indies and South America. His father had been a boyhood friend and political supporter of William Jennings Bryan, and when the great Commoner became Secretary of State, the elder Blackwell had requested for his son some lucrative and dignified place in the government. Robert's mastery of Spanish had decided what the place should be. The Secretary of State had informed Judge Blackwell that his son might have a foreign post, and Robert's elevation to

diplomatic powers had followed. He had served first in a small Central American country and had shown such tact and good sense and such a marked gift for the making of graceful speeches in Spanish that he had been promoted to a far more important place, and had meantime been allowed a furlough of three months in the United States. This vacation he had devoted to an industrious and careful pursuit of Gwendolyn Shorts.

Blackwell's failure had been primarily a physical one. He was a little man. In fact he weighed no more than did Gwendolyn, and as he sat beside her at the table, he looked distinctly smaller. He had never gotten so far as offering her the honour of sharing his diplomatic glories. His fate had been decided some weeks before in an interview between Gwendolyn and Mrs. Shorts.

"Don't you like him either?" the worried mother had demanded in the tone of one who offers attractive toys one after another to a spoilt child, only to see them carelessly thrown aside.

"Ma, you know I never could abide a little man," Gwendolyn replied. And Mrs. Shorts gave it up. Gwendolyn was infinitely good-natured, pliable to a certain extent, but she could not be driven. She had an enormous capacity for passive resistance . . . the most effective resistance of all in the long run, because it makes so little demand on the energies.

Blackwell also seemed to find this parting feast a stimulating occasion. He talked much and somewhat boastfully about the diplomatic service and his probable future in it, discussing capitals and nations, as a man who takes the whole world for his abode.

"Paris is where I expect to spend most of my days," he told them. "It is the most civilized place on earth, I believe.

No one who has lived there ever wants to live anywhere else."

"I wouldn't want to go there then," Gwendolyn said, "if it would make me dissatisfied with my own country."

Ralph Dolan said less than any of the other guests, and yet he was in a sense the centre of interest. Both of the other men recognized him as the probably successful rival and looked at him with envy. Mrs. Shorts, worn out by her long struggle, had lately begun to realize that he was perhaps the inevitable son-in-law, and she regarded him with a speculative, half-regretful eye. He and Gwendolyn exchanged now and then a covert glance of perfect understanding. He had told her earlier in the evening that he had something important to say to her and had asked permission to stay after the other guests had left.

The prospect of this interview was exciting to both of them, for they had seldom been alone together except for a few stolen moments at dances. Gwendolyn all that winter had been a much-occupied and carefully chaperoned young woman and Ralph had not tried to break through the barriers that her mother and society had erected around her. He had wooed her by being infinitely kind and obliging, by coming to her rescue always when she needed a partner at a dance, and by acting as her escort whenever she lacked one. Many a situation that might have been bitter or humiliating for Gwendolyn had been saved by Ralph's deft and loyal devotion. He had courted her with a studied thoughtfulness such as he had never shown any woman before. Their actual contacts had been of the slightest and most fleeting kind. Latterly he had permitted himself to squeeze her gently before he released her after a dance, and she had responded with a warm glance of her great gentle eyes.

All of this tact and delicacy on his part had been deliberate

and planned for a purpose. It had been a masterpiece of his cunning. He had seen that Gwendolyn must have her fling in society and that Mrs. Shorts must try for the kind of a marriage she wanted and must fail. Then his chance would come. It would have been a mistake to try to capture the girl by a swift and ruthless pursuit, as he had always captured them before. That would have been to antagonize the mother, and perhaps to see the girl snatched away from him, or to be turned from her door. It had been a case for patience and delicacy. Out of his resourcefulness and adaptability he had fashioned those qualities because he needed them. He had courted the mother no less than the daughter, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that she liked him despite her prejudice against him. He had played his part like a good mime. And he knew that he had succeeded. He knew that he was going to master these two women because he was stronger and more clever than they.

And yet when the others had gone and he sat alone with Gwendolyn he did not feel the cool and perfect mastery of the situation which should have been his. The prize he had wanted and worked for so long and so patiently was now within his reach. A woman he desired, with a fortune hanging over her head like a golden cloud! She was his for the taking. His cool judgment assured him of that. But his cool judgment was curiously confused by an emotion of reverence for this woman, of something like awe—which seemed to hold his hand and tie his tongue.

Woman is after all largely what man chooses or is able to make of her. And he had made of this woman an object of his tender solicitude—a person to be waited upon and cherished and held apart from other women. It had been in the beginning a wholly interested attitude, assumed for a

purpose, but like any other attitude which is held for a long time, it had ended by acquiring a certain emotional reality. Had Gwendolyn lacked the purely extrinsic advantages of her wealth and her social setting, he might have conquered her easily and quickly and she might have been just one more conquest. But he had laid upon himself an inhibition and it had become curiously a part of his feeling for her.

In every American male there is something of primitive woman-worship—a thing of ancient origin preserved and strengthened by the feminine domination to which every American is subjected from childhood. It produces men who can revere woman as an ideal and despise her as an instrument of sin, but who can seldom comprehend her as a human reality.

Ralph had led a roving pagan life. He had escaped much of the tribal discipline. But reverence for women he had learned at his mother's knee, and lying across that same knee, the fear of woman had been impressed upon him with a hair brush.

Woman gay, laughing, wanton—woman challenging or yielding, woman with the joy of life on her lips—he knew and loved and half-despised. She was his familiar playmate, his chief delight. But woman serious, dignified and inaccessible filled him with an awe that was half religious.

Gwendolyn had touched this latent native idealism in him as had no woman since his mother. She had played well the part he had assigned. Her deep placidity, her lack of imagination and humour, her unrebellious patience had perfectly fitted her for it. She had not flirted nor frivoled. She had neither sought adventures nor committed indiscretions. She had given him solemn promises with her eyes and waited his pleasure with the magnificent calm of a goddess.

Infinitely desirable she looked to him that night. Her soft, round richly-coloured beauty had always made a powerful appeal to him, and the longer he had contemplated it, withholding his hand, the stronger that appeal had grown. She seemed now almost too desirable to be possessed and he too eager to possess her. He had intended to be calm and masterful and tender, and instead he was short of breath and uncomfortable and half afraid for his cause. . . . It is written in the book of destiny that some woman shall make every man humble.

"Gwendolyn!"

His voice was anything but masterful. It was a desperate petition. It seemed strangely to echo back to him out of a distant past when a little boy had begged his mother for something he very much wanted.

"Gwendolyn . . . I . . . I . . ."

He had seized her hand, drew her toward him.

She came without demur or hesitation. She lay in his arms, she received his caresses passively, gratefully, as thirsty earth receives the rain. Long she had waited and wished for this moment. She was his, all and absolutely his. And likewise he was hers—to an extent that he had yet to realize.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

I

War was over and so was another winter. Once more the tremulous green flush of spring spread suddenly over the city. The cherry trees by the speedway were a cloud of pale blossom hanging over its image in green water. The Virginia hills were sprinkled with the white flowers of dogwood. Lovers and fishermen put out upon the river. Innumerable cars hummed and rumbled over the country roads.

Ralph lit a large cigar, climbed into his bright new wire-wheeled roadster, and set out for a Sunday morning drive through Rock Creek Park. His mood was one of profound self-satisfaction. He was intensely and pleasantly conscious of himself and of all the perquisites and ramifications of himself. This dapper healthful young man in the scarlet car was only a part of the elaborate organization of things and persons which made up the personality of Ralph Dolan. There was also the house on Massachusetts Avenue which he and Gwendolyn had taken, with its three servants and its three cars. There was Gwendolyn herself, with her warm, buxom appeal to his senses, her stupid, unquestioning devotion. There was the position he had accepted as the head of the National Commercial Association, and the suite of offices he would occupy and the subordinates he would command. Somewhat more remote, but none-the-less important, were the many persons he knew, who looked upon

him with respect and envy as a wealthy and successful young man. All of these things were a part of him. All of them were tributary to his abounding sense of permanence and security and well-being. And he was just beginning life. He was but thirty years old. This visible expansion of himself was a thing which had only begun.

Life was sweet to him, it was infinitely kind to him. He loved things—concrete, tangible things—money, women, good food and drink and tobacco, cars and houses. And he knew how to get things. His life was a simple, greedy gathering up of things he very much wanted. All of the world as he knew it seemed to be organized for the very purpose of giving him things. What was Washington but a great crowd of men and women struggling for love and money and security? Most of them were weak and stupid and did not get much. He was strong and clever and got a great deal. That was all of life as he saw it. Except that there were some queer people in it who did not seem to know what they wanted or how to get it. Otis, for instance. Colonel Bleason, with his vague idiotic yearnings. Above all, Henry Lambert, throwing good things away, chasing some wraith of an idea he could never catch. A perfect nut. What was the matter with him? Ralph didn't know.

Ralph got out at the Zoo and walked around to stretch his legs. People and other animals staring at each other through bars. At least all of the people stared stupidly and idly. Some of the animals stared, but not all of them. The lions for instance were magnificently indifferent. They had a dignity which the people lacked.

A great hulking countryman was standing before a cage in which was confined a big baboon. The countryman was feeding him peanuts in defiance of the rules. He would

give the baboon a peanut and then eat a peanut himself while the baboon ate. He and the baboon looked at each other with a mild friendly interest. The baboon captured a flee. The countryman scratched his head. He tossed the baboon the last peanut and shuffled on.

In the bear pit two polar bears carried on a ferocious rumbling love affair. A growing knot of people watched them intently, self-consciously, not daring to look at each other, yet unable to forego the spectacle. Blushing wives pulled at their husbands' sleeves, trying to get them away, glancing back regretfully when they had succeeded. Courting couples looked up at the sky and the tree-tops, talked about the weather. Worried parents hurried by, herding their innocent off-spring before them. "Oh look, papa! The bears are fighting." "Yes, dear. We'll go and look at the monkeys now."

One touch of nature makes the whole world blush.

The bears philandered with magnificent innocence, as though they knew they were there to educate the people.

The crowd becoming so dense that he could not see the bears very well, Ralph motored out through the park along roads shaded by great hickories and elms where squirrels barked and raced. Everywhere were strolling couples, all dressed up for Sunday. The girls had on pretty frocks very clean and well-laundered. The men were all shaved and talcummed and had on high white shining collars. They all smiled at each other and walked carefully and slowly, so as not to muss themselves up or perspire. They spread newspapers on the benches before they sat down, so that they would not soil themselves. The women spread their dresses carefully and pulled them down as to hide their legs. The men hitched up their trousers as they sat,

so as not to take the crease out of them. They sat and smiled at each other.

Almost every couple carried a little kodak. The man would take a picture of the girl, standing on a rustic bridge, or leaning against a tree. Then the girl would take a picture of the man. If a third person were available they had their picture taken together.

There were many married couples accompanied by well-laundered infants, who were constantly being rescued from mud puddles and poison oak and deprived of pebbles and sticks and other contaminating objects. And along the road rolled an endless procession of cars filled with newly washed, carefully dressed, smiling people. It was a magnificent parade of self-conscious respectability—of gentility taking the air, carefully, with perfect good manners, somewhat uncomfortably, but amply rewarded by its complacent consciousness of its own immaculate nicety. Humanity made as perfect as soap, shoe polish, razors and a religious regard for the other fellow's opinion can make it. Here and there an honest hiker in his old clothes, sweated and swung a stick. A few children, escaped from their parents, played in the mud by the creek.

2

Out beyond Miller Cabin, where the crowd thins, Henry Lambert was sitting on the ground with a pad on his knees and a large pipe in his mouth, scribbling. He still wore the uniform of the United States Army. He was thinner than usual and a walking stick lay on the ground beside him. He wrote with great speed and with an absorbed eagerness, spouting a huge cloud of smoke every few minutes.

Ralph saw him from the road, stopped and hailed him,

got no answer, parked his car and walked over to where Henry sat. Henry looked up irritated and frowning, but dropped his work and rose smiling when he recognized Ralph. They shook hands and sat down on the grass again to talk. Ralph offered Henry a cigar out of a silver pocket cigar case. Henry accepted it with pleasure, lit it and savoured the unaccustomed Havana luxuriously.

A chance observer would have said that a kindly and prosperous gentleman was patronizing a poor returned soldier, giving him a needed smoke, listening to his war stories. For Ralph was not only sumptuously dressed, but he had in a high degree the look and bearing of a man who is a winner in life. His figure had thickened perceptibly in the past few years and he had raised a small black moustache. There was a gathering roll of fat on the back of his neck that showed when he threw his head back and laughed. He had a look of dignity and solidity and appeared older than he was. Yet his face had changed little during the years he had spent in Washington. It was smooth as ever and a little more full, a little heavier in the jowls. The eyes were habitually narrower. They seemed to express more cunning and less eagerness. Otherwise he was the same—a young Bacchus growing stout on revelry and good living.

Henry looked boyish beside him—thin, eager and excitable whereas Ralph was plump, satisfied and quiet. And yet the years had left tracks on Henry's face, had changed the very mould of it. The look of dreaming innocence it had once had in repose, and which had caused him to win the nickname of Sleeping Jesus in college, was gone. His chin seemed to have drawn up and become more firm. His mouth had acquired a set of resolution and also a twist of irony, so that his smile was always a little crooked. The cleft in his brow was deep and permanent and his expression

was one of humorous, defiant irritation—the look of a man who just holds bitterness at bay, who has seen despair and decided to laugh at it.

These two had gone far in different directions since they first had met, and yet their friendship still held good. They still enjoyed a mutual spontaneous response, for both of them were men on the make. Each of them in his own way was growing, winning against his environment. For that reason each of them was in love with life and interested in the other as a part of it. To Ralph it was a great luscious lollypop that he rolled on his tongue, that comfortably filled and warmed his belly. Ultimately it would make him fat and stupid. For Henry it had a sharp acidulous flavour. It was more a wine than a food and a perilous rather than a satisfying thing. Henry had found life difficult and bewildering. More than once it had nearly destroyed him. He cared for no opinion but his own, and life seemed bent on humiliating him in his own eyes. It had repeatedly driven him to accept things he despised in order that he might escape things he despised still more. He asked of it nothing but his self-respect and his freedom and it seemed forever trying to rob him of both. . . . And yet Henry was in love with life. He loved life, as a man may love a woman who makes him suffer, because he felt that he was making conquest of it, that it was yielding to him little by little, that triumph and satisfaction were somewhere ahead. The human animal has a great capacity for punishment. Only the man who is being pushed back, whose grip on reality is slipping, longs for the black and perfect rest of death.

"No, I didn't get across," Henry was saying. "And I didn't get that soft job I hoped for either. I flew and I fell and I broke three bones in my left ankle. Then I caught the influenza, and before I got well the armistice came.

At present I'm being educated at government expense. . . . I get a hundred dollars a month, and with what I can pick up by doing a feature story now and then I make out pretty well. My faith in Divine Providence is restored. I had a hunch the war was going to do something for me and it has. It's given me leisure for the first time in my life. . . ."

"But how about your family?" Ralph asked.

"The family is strangely merciful," Henry explained. "You see I'm a hero now and also a sick man. Women and boneheads can't appreciate art, but they can appreciate both heroism and sickness. My nerves are supposed to be shattered. I'm a very interesting and peculiar psychopathic case. My leg will soon be all right and I'll soon be done convalescing from the flu, but my nerves will last me a long time. The doctor has told my wife and all the in-laws that I must have absolute rest and quiet for an indefinite period. I'm resting to the tune of about a thousand words a day, besides notes and reading. . . ."

"What are you working on?" Ralph asked him. "I suppose you'll finish that play you started about five years ago when we lived in the Y."

"No," said Henry. "That went to the junk pile long ago. It was nothing but a childish romantic dream, anyhow. It seemed to me in those days that life here in Washington was incredibly ugly and dreary and colourless. I wanted something bright and pretty and fine to console me and so I made an imaginary colonial epoch out of a few old buildings and a few legends and lies. The thing never did have any vitality. And the deeper I dug into the subject, the more I found that those days were, if possible, even worse than this. Old George Washington for instance. He was going to be the noble character of the drama—a

sort of suffering saint as I saw him. Well, George was a great man, all right. He was a great executive and a good soldier. But he was likewise a Philistine and a money-grubber. He never worked half as hard being the father of his country as he did taking land away from homesteaders over in West Virginia. He was a real estate dealer and promoter first and a patriot afterwards, same as the kind we have now. He even profiteered in real estate when he built the capital. And by way of recreation he fought roosters and drank corn liquor. He had a red nose and sang hymns and liked nigger wenches. All that, of course, was nothing against him. He was a great man and the only kind of a man he could be in the circumstances. He put through a revolution because he thought it would improve business. He talked about God and Liberty and thought about land and taxes. He was a demagogue, like every public man, because he had to be. You can no more drive a public without lies than you can drive a mule without cuss words."

"Well, why don't you go ahead and write a book and show him up?" Ralph enquired, grinning, delighted that he had gotten Henry started. "You were always strong for showing people up. . . ."

"Because he's too remote and it's too hard to get facts about him," Henry explained. "The point is that he failed me as an ideal, and as an example of reality he isn't half as accessible and significant as men that are with us now. Why dig poor old George out of his wreath-covered brick tomb when the woods are full of live ones that a man can look at?"

"What is the nature of this thing you're writing, then?" Ralph wanted to know.

"It's a picture of life in Washington today," Henry

announced. "It's a full-length portrait of Democracy in action—of this magnificent explosion of misdirected human energy which is our capital."

He was intensely excited now—an artist intoxicated with his theme.

"Every character in it is drawn from the life and every one of them is typical. A great crowd of men playing a game with words. Muddy-minded, self-deceived sentimentalists shouting fine words and believing in them. Cool, greedy, shrewd men making a screen of words to hide their pilfering. Simple-minded men playing with words they don't understand, like trained seals doing a trick, knowing only that if they carry it through they'll be fed at the end. A few intelligent men, angry, frustrate, bewildered, building fragile dikes of logic and fact against an irresistible flood of lies. And under the surface play of words, the dark, deep-moving currents of desire—lust and envy and greed and love of power—the things men fear, the things that rule them. It's a rich and beautiful spectacle, Ralph—rich in absurdity and tragedy, in the clash and contrast of character, in the pageantry of moving masses. I see it as that and as nothing more. I have nothing against it. We may be floundering toward a millenium for all I know. I only want to put it on paper. And I know I can't. I know I can't make others see it and feel it as I do. I know that when I've finished the thing it'll be just a long string of words, with a faint flash of colour and passion here and there. And yet I know that it's good as such things go. I know that for the first time I am uttering myself. . . ."

"I should say you are, Henry!" Ralph observed. "But I could never see that you had any trouble doing that. I suppose you'll be the hero of this book?"

"No," said Henry, with his twisted smile, "I am alto-

gether too exceptional and superior for the purpose, Ralph. Besides the book hasn't any hero. But it has a central character. And the central character is going to be you, Ralph, or at least a man like you. . . ."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Ralph.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

1

The banquet which ended the annual convention of the National Commercial Association was about to take place in one of the downtown hotels. The great dining room was a gridiron of long narrow tables. Huge chandeliers shone upon napery, silver and glass. Gentlemen in full dress, chattering and guffawing, slowly filled the chairs and sat expectant. Presently through a side door entered in single file another crowd of gentlemen in dress suits, looking exactly like the guests, except that each of them carried a tray of oyster cocktails. The banquet was under way.

It dragged slowly through its seven courses. The room was darkened and a ghastly flashlight picture was made of the Association members, showing them all startled and pale, as they might have looked if a Bolshevik uprising in New Jersey had just been announced.

Then the speech-making began. One after another portly portentous gentleman rose and alternately rumbled about radicalism and the tariff and told funny stories.

2

Ralph was as nervous as it is possible for a man of phlegmatic nature and great self-assurance to become. He was about to make his first public address, and he knew that a great deal depended upon the impression he made. He had won his new job in the face of much rivalry, and of some opposition from members of the Association who

thought an older man should have had the place. But he had gained the favour of the president of the Association, to whom he had been highly recommended by Colonel Bleason, and his brilliant marriage, his frequent mention in society columns, his possession of a fortune and of a house admirably appointed for entertaining, had decided the contest in his favour. He had been endowed with the title of Executive Secretary of the National Commercial Association in Charge of the Washington Office, with a salary of twenty-five thousand dollars a year and with an elastic appropriation for entertainment and for emergency use in the battle against class legislation.

The president, he suddenly realized, was introducing him.

"The appointment of this brilliant young man," he was saying, "to take charge of the all-important work of the Association here in Washington, marks a change of policy on the part of this organization. Heretofore the head of the National Commercial Association has always been a man trained in the law. Mr. Dolan is not a lawyer. He is a past master of the art of publicity. He has served a long and varied apprenticeship in the newspaper world, and enjoys an exceptionally wide acquaintance among newspapermen and legislators. For more than a year previous to the outbreak of the war he was engaged in publicity work for this Association, and I can personally testify to his efficiency and energy. When the war broke out, Mr. Dolan left us to devote himself to the service of his country as a publicity man for the Red Cross, and some of the highest officials of that institution, including my old friend Colonel Bleason, whose right-hand man Mr. Dolan was, have personally assured me that the great and indispensable success of the Red Cross work was in no small measure due to his brilliant efforts.

"Gentlemen, the thought I want to leave with you tonight, above all others, is the thought that we face in the future a battle of propaganda. The war was won as much by propaganda as by men and guns. Private property and law and order must be defended in this country by propaganda, or they will have to be defended with guns. Bolshevism, the most pernicious and degraded creed ever hatched by the brain of mortal man, is seeking to poison the mind of the world by a system of insidious propaganda which has ramifications in every nation, including our own. The most important work of our great Association is to oppose the spread of this nefarious doctrine of communism, which seeks not only to destroy the sacred rights of private property, and to kill the individual initiative which has made our great country what it is, but would also drag sacred womanhood through the mire of its incredible beastiality. . . ."

(*Loud applause. The president mops his brow with a large silk handkerchief and consumes a glass of water.*)

"Gentlemen, this subtle enemy of everything that decent folk hold dear, this demon of irresponsible radicalism, must be fought and beaten in the press. We must fight fire with fire. And it is for this reason that I take pleasure in announcing to you the appointment of a publicity man of consummate skill and wide experience as the head of our Washington office, and in assuring you that he will reorganize it in such a way as to make it one of the most efficient engines of publicity in America. (*More applause.*)

"Concerning Mr. Dolan himself, I have only one word more to say. Prominent Republican leaders have told me in the last few days that Mr. Dolan has been mentioned as a candidate for Congress in his home state of Indiana. These leaders are looking for young men of high ability and

sound principle to be put forward as candidates in the great reaction against Wilsonism and radicalism which is about to take place in this country. Mr. Dolan has assured me that he will not consider a call to enter the political field at this time, and I mention the matter merely as one more testimonial to his high ability and to the confidence which is placed in him by the leaders of conservative thought in this country. . . . Gentlemen! Members of the National Commercial Association!—Mr. Dolan!"

He was standing before them. They were all looking at him and applauding—a vivid block of upturned faces and pattering hands. He had prepared and memorized a neat little speech, full of well-turned sonorous phrases, sound conservative principles, rotund platitudes. They were all old familiar things that he had mouthed and written over and over again. He had used them all in speeches he had written for Colonel Bleason. They had no real meaning for him. They were the well-worn tools of his trade—things he knew by long experience would serve a purpose. He had picked them up in conversation and reading and he uttered them when he needed them with a careless instinctive skill, as a boy picks out a smooth pebble to throw at a stray cat.

And yet they had deserted him now. He could not think of one of them. The curious grab-bag which served him as an intellect seemed empty.

He must say something. He must say something good. A great deal depended upon the speech he made now. His courage had not deserted him. He drew a deep breath and threw back his shoulders.

"Gentlemen!" he said, "Members of the National Commercial Association!"

His voice was strong and rich. This was the first time

he had ever lifted it up before a crowd, in a great still hall. How beautifully his words rolled forth! The patter of hands came to an end. There were a few coughs, the scraping of chairs, low words, then silence. They were waiting for him to go on. These men, the mighty of the earth, who controlled millions, were waiting upon his words! They should have them!

"Gentlemen, I stand before you this evening to thank you for a magnificent opportunity—an opportunity to serve civilization!"

How splendid it sounded! How easy it was after all! Words beget words. He found himself going on easily, fluently, telling them in rich rolling phrases what they wanted to hear—that they were a bulwark of civilization against which the wild waves of radicalism should beat in vain, that equal opportunity for all men and freedom of personal initiative should be preserved, that the sacred right of private property must and will be defended!

He had caught them. He was holding them. He was making a conquest of his audience. But—far more important—he was also making a conquest of himself. How true it was—all that he was saying! Was he not a living proof of the fact that in this great land of opportunity, personal initiative and intelligence win a rich reward?

He saw himself in a new light, discovered in himself a new power. He was a brave young knight going forth to save the Holy Grail of property from the infidels and barbarians of Bolshevism. With this new sword of the spoken word which came so ready to his hand, he would fight a mighty battle!

He had finished. He had made the speech of the evening. The spontaneous crash of applause told him as much. He stood smiling, high-headed, triumphant. He stood be-

fore the great of the earth as one of them, as a leader of them. It came upon him suddenly, as inspiration comes to a prophet, that he was an important man—perhaps,—even (Oh, sweet and daring thought!)—a Great Man!

THE END

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